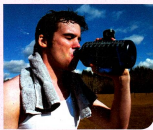


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**Sports drinks v water**

Find out the best way to stay healthy and hydrated during a regular workout.

**ID fraud**

We tell you the top 10 threats to your good name and how to avoid them.

On test

- + MP3 players
- + Canopy rangehoods
- + Electric ovens
- + Air conditioners
- + Pool cleaners
- + Car roof boxes
- + Playpens

Shopping for a cause

Does your pink dollar really help fight breast cancer?

Emissions trading scheme — what will it mean for your wallet?

New car options — not worth the money

Guess how much water you buy in packaged ham?

Getting a sunkissed glow from a bottle



**167 PRODUCTS
RATED!**



The inaugural CHOICE Mouse awards: for excellence in restaurant guide websites

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Subscribers' helpline call 02 9577 3399



Email ausconsumer@choice.com.au

How CHOICE helps you. CHOICE gives you the power to choose the very best goods and services, and avoid the worst. Because we pay full price for the products we test, we can remain 100% independent. We don't take advertising and we don't accept freebies from industry — our only aim is to give consumers the best possible information about buying products and services. Our income is only from subscriptions to our magazines and choice.com.au, and from other services we supply for the benefit of consumers. We're not a government body and we don't receive government funding.

We have laboratories in Marrickville, Sydney, that test everything from juicers to plasma TVs, coffee grinders to MP3 players and air conditioners. We test hundreds of products every year. There's no hidden agenda to our testing — we simply road-test products so that consumers like you don't get ripped off. CHOICE ratings are based on lab tests, expert assessments and consumer surveys.

CHOICE also has staff who research a wide range of consumer services — everything from the financial industry to the organic food business, supermarket practices to drug companies and pharmacies. They reveal the truth behind the facts and figures, and investigate the quality and the claims.

CHOICE has also always campaigned about consumer goods and services that affect your life. We lobby government and regulators on behalf of all consumers in Australia. CHOICE was established in 1959 and is a not-for-profit, non-party-political organisation.



CHOICE Best Buy CHOICE calls a product a Best Buy if it delivers high quality at a comparatively low price. Not every test report has Best Buys.



CHOICE Green Buy CHOICE calls a product a Green Buy if it delivers both good quality and environmental performance at a comparatively low price. Not every test report has Green Buys.



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CHOICE Shopper

Call 1300 360 655. All you need is the model name and number of the product you want to buy, the price you want to beat, and your CHOICE subscriber number. CHOICE Shopper is available to personal subscribers only.



On test

- 38 + MP3 players** Our test reveals the best portable music players on the market.
- 42 + Canopy rangehoods** All 10 on test can be installed in ducted or recirculating mode.
- 45 + Electric multifunction ovens** Can modern ovens really clean themselves?
- 50 + Air conditioners** We tested five new split-system inverter models and added them to the models still available from our last test.
- 54 + Pool cleaners** Most do the job well enough, but one could not be recommended.
- 57 + Car roof boxes** Not all car roof boxes are easy to fit to a car and load or unload.
- 60 + Playpens** We found only one of the 10 playpens we tested completely safe.



Comment

A consumer protection nightmare



Mobile premium services are a hot topic for many consumers: they're '19' numbers that offer ring tones, games, horoscopes, dating information or the weather. Consumers have no protection against aggressive promotion of

expensive services they don't understand and often don't want. Many services target young consumers, and some of them are little more than scams. The fact that they're subscription services with fees of \$20 or \$30 a month is hidden in the fine print. See our parody ad, Jambazilla, at choice.com.au/jambazilla. 

The number of complaints about these services to the Telecommunications Ombudsman is increasing rapidly — in the first quarter of this year they ran at 2000 per month, up from 1000 per month in the first half of last year. But the industry has failed to develop a satisfactory response.

Other problems include buck-passing between telcos and retailers when consumers' phones stop working (CHOICE, Jan/Feb 2007) and limitations on what the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman can look into.

All in all, consumer protection in telecommunications is a mess. It's a self-regulatory system based on a set of confusing industry codes of conduct that companies can choose to belong to — or not. Some codes have no members at all. And when the industry drafts codes, does it take into account consumer viewpoints? Not often.

CHOICE has commissioned a report on how to move to best practice in telco consumer protection which recommends a comprehensive review of current arrangements for consumer protection.

We're pleased to see that the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy has already commenced action to improve the structure and funding of consumer representation. We'll continue lobbying for an improved regulatory system.

For a copy of the report and further information, go to choice.com.au/telecommunications. ■

Anny Friis
Editorial Director

CHOICEextra.com.au

This is a free website for CHOICE magazine subscribers. It's an index of articles going back to Jan/Feb 2002, with links to PDFs so that you can read many of them immediately. You log in with your subscriber number, which is above your name on the mailing label that comes with the magazine.

+ UPDATE: 127-132 CM TVs

More big TVs tested

In the short time since our test published in the September issue there have been changes in the market for big TVs.

The LG 50PG70FD remains our Best Buy because it's a lot cheaper than any of the other models in the *What to buy* list.

We tested new 127 cm plasma models from PANASONIC and SAMSUNG and a 132 cm LCD SAMSUNG; and the CONIA, PHILIPS, SHARP and TOSHIBA from the September test have been discontinued.

That leaves the NEC as the only model with the lower resolution of 1366 x 768 pixels — the others are all 1920 x 1080. Although it's at the bottom of the ratings now, it outperformed the CONIA and PHILIPS overall and is a comparatively cheap option if you can live with its noticeable persistence of static images and lack of darkness in dark scenes.

Of the newly tested models, the SAMSUNG LA52A650A1F (the LCD model) has been added to the *What to buy* list and is profiled on the right, while the LG 50PG70FD remains our

Best Buy because it's considerably cheaper than any of the other recommended models (see the September issue for their profiles).

You can read the full article, including the new models, at choiceextra.com.au — go to 'Television' in the index and click on 127cm Plasma and LCD Sept 08.

The rest of the new models

- The SAMSUNG PS50A550S1F (plasma) has a good picture and an easy-to-use onscreen menu system, but its touchpad for onboard controls is difficult to use. Its sound is weak in the bass and harsh in higher frequencies. HDMI inputs are both front and back, but SAMSUNG warns that HDMI may not work with some older devices. We found this to be true — only the SAMSUNG TVs in this test had similar problems.
- The PANASONIC TH-50PZ800A has an SD card slot that can be used for viewing JPEG images. Its picture has banding in motion and motion blur, and its sound distorts noticeably at high volumes.



SAMSUNG LA52A650A1F

Price \$4999

GOOD POINTS

- Very good picture quality.
- Remote control keys can be illuminated and it can be used to control other Samsung devices.
- Very good onscreen user menus.
- HDMI input front and back.
- Swivel screen.
- USB socket at the front.
- Headphones socket.
- Three-year warranty.

BAD POINTS

- Two faulty pixels in the sample we tested, but they're invisible from normal viewing distance.
- The rear connections are very difficult to access when the TV is wall-mounted.
- The onboard TV controls are on a touchpad, which makes them very difficult to see.
- The HDMI connection isn't compatible with some older devices. ■

What to buy \$

SONY KDL52X3100	\$5899
SAMSUNG LA52A650A1F	\$4999
PIONEER PDP-LX508A	\$5999
LG 50PG70FD	\$3499

BEST
BUY

PRODUCT	PERFORMANCE							SPECIFICATIONS			
	Overall score (%)	Picture quality score (%)	Sound quality score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Energy score (%)	Energy consumption when in use (W)	Display type	Screen size	Contact	Price (\$ RRP)	
Brand / model (in rank order)											
Sony KDL52X3100	75	82	80	61	68	290	LCD	132 cm (52 in)	www.sony.com.au	5899	
Samsung LA52A650A1F	73	81	55	69	77	229	LCD	132 cm (52 in)	www.samsung.com.au	4999	
Pioneer PDP-LX508A	71	86	70	53	50	382	Plasma	127 cm (50 in)	www.pioneer.com.au	5999	
LG 50PG70FD	70	86	60	66	42	431	Plasma	127 cm (50 in)	www.lge.com.au	3499	
Panasonic TH-50PZ800A	65	78	40	67	57	332	Plasma	127 cm (50 in)	www.panasonic.com.au	3649	
Samsung PS50A550S1F	65	81	40	62	53	359	Plasma	127 cm (50 in)	www.samsung.com.au	3299	
NEC PXT-50XD2	59	61	50	62	58	322	Plasma	127 cm (50 in)	www.nec.com.au	2499	

+ MARKETING

A close look reveals that most of the drinks contain less than 1% juice.



Health claims don't hold water

CHOICE lodges a complaint about labelling and marketing of Glaceau Vitamin Water.

Snazzy, colourful and “nutrient enhanced” — these are some of the selling points of a new drinks range called Glaceau Vitamin Water. But if, like us, you read the fine print on the label, you’ll discover what’s marketed as a sensible alternative to sugary soft drinks is nowhere near as sensible or as healthy as the package implies.

Produced by Coca-Cola Amatil (supposedly for an organisation called the ‘Centre for Responsible Hydration’), these drinks appeal to a growing number of health-conscious consumers. They have names such as “revive”, “essential”, “focus” and “energy” and claim to offer health benefits such as “the power

of triple antioxidants which keep you healthy” and “a way to get your morning vitamin C plus calcium”.

In many cases, however, CHOICE found that these marketing messages are gross overstatements of what the products deliver. For example, while the colour of these drinks and the use of fruits in product names (‘acai-blueberry-pomegranate’ and ‘kiwi-strawberry’) give an impression that they contain a significant amount of fruit, a closer look at the disclaimers reveals that most of the drinks contain less than 1% juice and some have no fruit juice at all.

As a result, CHOICE lodged a complaint with the ACCC and the NSW Food Authority in June, alerting the

regulators that Glaceau Vitamin Water is potentially contravening both the Trade Practices Act and the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code.

“These drinks are presented as healthy because they’ve got added vitamins, yet they’re very high in sugar,” CHOICE Senior Food Policy Officer Clare Hughes said. “One serve of this product supplies an average adult woman with one third of her recommended dietary intake of sugar.”

CHOICE urges the ACCC to review the labelling and marketing of Glaceau Vitamin Water to prevent consumers from being misled by explicit and implied claims about the fruit content and nutrition benefits of these drinks. ■

+ HEALTH

Inroads into cancer treatment and prevention

While the terms ‘good news’ and ‘cancer’ don’t often go together, interesting new developments in cancer research offer hope for preventing and treating the disease.



Prostate cancer A small preliminary trial of the drug abiraterone offers hope for a longer, better quality of life for men with prostate cancer. The UK drug trial was conducted on 21 men with aggressive tumours that had failed to respond to other treatments. The tumours shrank in more than half the cases, and in some cases men were able to stop taking morphine, which is used to relieve bone pain.

Researchers caution that the results are based on a small trial, and larger trials are currently under way. If the promising results are upheld, the drug will be more widely available from 2011 — good news for the one in nine Australian men who’ll develop prostate cancer.



Breast cancer October is recognised internationally as breast cancer month. While breast cancer in women is slightly more common than prostate cancer in men, breast cancer survival rates tend to be a little higher than those for prostate cancer, partly due to earlier detection of breast cancer. But this isn’t always the case, especially among overweight women.

A long-term Swedish study has found that women who are overweight or have insulin resistance — a precursor to type 2 diabetes — have a 50% greater risk of being diagnosed with breast cancer at an advanced stage. The more advanced the tumour, the less successfully it can be treated. Women can reduce their risk of breast cancer by being active and maintaining a healthy weight.



Melanoma With one in 30 Australians expected to contract melanoma, a new development in its treatment has been discovered by Australian researchers. Certain tumour cells injected with a red organic dye — called rose bengal — self-destructed, without causing much damage to healthy tissue. It’s early days, though, and larger trials are under way.

Cancer survival rates In other good news, an international study has placed Australia among the top nations for cancer survival rates. However, say the experts, there’s still room for improvement, namely through greater uptake of screening for bowel and breast cancer, and reduced levels of smoking. ■

A recent study has placed Australia among the top nations for cancer survival rates.

+ FAIR FEES



CUA cuts penalty fees

The country's largest credit union, CUA, will cut commonly charged penalty fees by 12.5% to 40%, following pressure from CHOICE's Fair Fees Campaign.

CUA's fee reductions make some of the large banks' penalty fees look completely excessive.

The changes, which are effective from 1 September, include:

- The penalty when a customer's account has insufficient funds to cover a direct debit to a third party is reduced from \$20 to \$16, a 20% reduction.
- Cheque dishonour (outward) fee reduced from \$40 to \$35, a 12.5% reduction.
- Cheque dishonour (inward) fee reduced from \$15 to \$9, a 40% reduction.

Commenting on the changes, CUA said, "The actions taken by CHOICE in highlighting unreasonable bank fees have certainly brought to our attention some inequities, and we have been conscious of this in our negotiations with the third parties [banks] that we use for wholesale banking services."

However, unlike almost all major banks, CUA will continue to charge a penalty for cheques that bounce when lodged into the customer's account. The credit union blames the banks, as it needs to access the

banking system for cheque services. "We remain committed to pressuring our bankers to continue reducing the fees they charge to us," CUA says.

CUA will increase some other fees by up to 50%. For example, replacing a lost Visa card will cost \$15 instead of \$10, and the fee for overseas ATM withdrawals increases from \$4 to \$5. CUA says the extra revenue it will get from those fees is nominal when compared with the money members will save from the reduction in penalty fees.

CUA's fee reductions make some of the large banks' penalty fees on standard accounts appear completely excessive, and we think there's no justification for them. At \$45, St George's direct debit dishonour fee is now nearly three times CUA's. ANZ, Commonwealth and Westpac charge \$35 for direct debit dishonours, more than double the credit union's \$16. CHOICE continues to lobby for an independent regulator with the power to investigate bank penalty fees. ■

+ EATING OUT

Name and shame

Some state governments are introducing laws designed to publicly name and shame food businesses that aren't up to scratch.

Until recently, the restaurant you frequent every Friday night could have received fines for anything from rat infestations to dirty cooking equipment, but you wouldn't have known.

Moves are now afoot to make public the names of restaurants and food establishments that have received penalties for unsafe or unhygienic food practices. Clearly not all of them take their responsibility for food safety practices seriously enough, and it's the job of local council health officers to ensure that restaurants do the right thing.

NSW is the first state to publish a list of businesses that have either

been prosecuted or received penalties for unsafe food handling practices. The 'Name and Shame' list on the NSW Food Authority website (www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au) has been popular since its launch in July.

In WA, details of prosecutions have been provided by local councils on a voluntary basis for some time, but future prosecutions will be published on the Department of Health website. The Queensland government is also keen to follow NSW's lead and publish a name and shame file. The other states and territories have yet to commit to such a scheme.

CHOICE agrees that consumers have the right to know whether a

food business has been found guilty of an offence, and would like to see more detailed hygiene inspection information available nationally. Not only does it give consumers information on a restaurant's record, it also provides an incentive for all businesses to improve and maintain their hygiene practices — one strike and your reputation is tarnished, possibly irreparably.

For more information see *Perils of eating out* in the November 2007 issue of CHOICE, or go to choiceextra.com.au and click on that issue under 'Restaurant hygiene' in the index. ■



Consumers have the right to know whether a food business has been found guilty of an offence.

+ FOOD PACKAGING

Traffic light labelling gets the green light from consumers

New research shows that traffic lights help consumers make healthier food choices.

Kellogg's was the first to use the % Daily Intake guide (%DI) on the front of cereal packets and now many manufacturers have started using it to inform consumers about the nutrition content of their products. An alternative system, based on colour-coded traffic lights, has been suggested as a more useful tool for consumers, but until recently, no Australian research had been conducted to compare the various systems and identify which one is better understood by consumers.

The Australian Food and Grocery Council, which developed the %DI system, has been lauding research claiming that consumers love the %DI system, but new research conducted jointly by CHOICE and a collaboration of public health groups, including the Cancer Council NSW, shows that it may not be as well understood as it needs to be. The research, conducted in four different shopping centres in Sydney and Newcastle and covering a cross-section of socioeconomic groups, showed that although consumers believe the %DI guide to be the most helpful and user-friendly system, when asked to use it to correctly assess the healthiness of a product, it failed to deliver.

Consumers were asked to compare four products using four different labelling options: the %DI guide, a colour-coded %DI guide, a traffic light system and a traffic light system with an overall rating.

The traffic light system ranks the total fat, saturated fat, sugar and salt as high, medium or low

and gives a red, amber or green light accordingly. The overall rating for the traffic light system gives an additional 'coloured light' for the overall healthiness of the product.

The %DI system is based on an average adult energy intake of 8700 kJ a day and tells you what percentage of your daily energy, protein, fat, saturated fat, carbohydrates, sugars, fibre and sodium you're getting from a serve of the food or drink, as well as some vitamins and minerals. The colour-coded %DI system applies traffic light colours to each nutrient in the %DI scheme.

The results showed that while the majority of respondents thought that the colour-coded %DI system was the easiest to interpret, when asked to identify the healthier of two products within specific categories, consumers were better at picking the healthier product using the traffic light system. Significantly, consumers in lower-income households, which research has shown are at a higher risk of obesity, had more difficulty using the %DI system.

While it's encouraging to see the food industry trying to help us make good choices, it's important that the system employed is as easily understood as possible. From this research, the evidence suggests that the traffic light system is the best way of most accurately imparting this information and helping consumers make healthier food choices. ■



The traffic light system ranks the total fat, saturated fat, sugar and salt as high, medium or low and gives a red, amber or green light accordingly.

In brief

On your bike

If you want to reduce your carbon footprint and get fit at the same time, why not hop on a bike? This year's National Ride to Work Day is on 15 October. You can register to participate by logging on to ride2work.com.au. For more information on cycling, see *Getting around on a bike* in our July issue, or go to choice.com.au.



Sounds too good ...

... to be true. National Australia Bank has released a home loan without an exit fee, which usually applies if you refinance within the first three to five years. But there's a trap: you pay the standard home loan rate. With other loans borrowers can get a discount of up to 0.7%, depending on their loan amount.

Lens to help manage glaucoma

About 300,000 Australians have glaucoma, so it's good news that American researchers are developing a contact lens containing nanosilver particles that can conduct electricity. The electrical resistance changes with shape and this can be used to detect any deformity of the eyeball caused by a rise in pressure. Pressure build-up inside the eye is caused by glaucoma, a group of diseases where the optic nerve is slowly destroyed. While the damage can't be reversed, loss of eyesight can be prevented or at least slowed down.

PHILIPS PHOTO FRAME/CLOCK/RADIO

Alarming images

PHILIPS AJL308/79

Price \$230
Contact 1300 363 391

The PHILIPS AJL308/79 combines a clock, FM radio and 15.4 x 8.5 cm LCD screen for displaying photos and video. It's an improvement on some of the photo frames we've tested in the past, but it's far from perfect.

GOOD POINTS

- It's easy to use both as a clock radio and an electronic photo frame.
- Setting the alarm is very simple and the menus are reasonably logical.
- You can have two alarm settings in a 24-hour period, with separate buttons.
- Auto-dim function reduces the screen brightness at preset times (in case you need low light to sleep).
- JPEG images can be displayed as a single frame or a slide show when it's in photo frame mode, but remain as a static image in clock mode.
- It claims to play DivX or MP4 movie files. These file formats are reasonably common on digital cameras. We managed to get DivX to work, but had no success with MP4.
- Plays MP3 and WMA music files.

BAD POINTS

- At \$230 it's not cheap.
- The sound is tinny and unpleasant.
- Picture quality is as good as the better photo frames we've tested in the past, but that's not saying much. Resolution is low (480 x 234 pixels), but at least the colour isn't too bad.
- It has no onboard memory. You attach an SD card or USB device to see your images, or listen to music (other than the radio).
- It makes an unpleasant noise when the brightness is set to low.

CHOICE VERDICT

If the sound was much better and the picture had higher resolution, it would be a reasonable product at about half the price. We're inclined to wait and see if something better comes along. ■



► The Philips' clock, radio and photo frame has no onboard memory so you attach an SD card or USB device to see your images or listen to your music.



EXTERNAL BLU-RAY DRIVE

Blu-ray as backup

High-capacity Blu-ray drives the future of optical storage.

The day of the CD as optical disc storage king is long gone and even dual-layer DVDs are following suit. The new removable storage champion is Blu-ray, created to cope with the massive amounts of information needed for high-definition video and data backups.

Even though a Blu-ray disc looks the same size as a DVD, Blu-ray can hold up to 10 times more information. It's emerging as the successor to DVDs for distribution of commercial movies after winning the high-definition format war early this year over the rival HD-DVD format.

The LACIE d2 Blu-ray drive is one of the first external Blu-ray drives to be released in Australia. Unlike most lounge-room Blu-ray disc players, this LACIE not only reads Blu-ray discs, along with DVDs and CDs, but can also 'burn' (record to) all three formats.

The drive includes a USB 2.0 port and two FireWire 400 ports for high-speed connection to a computer. Blu-ray recordable (write once) or rewritable (write many times) discs can hold either 25 GB (single-sided discs) or 50 GB (double-sided discs). Discs cost about \$20 for single-sided and \$40 for double-sided, but are expected to become cheaper as the format grows in popularity.

Software supplied with the drive lets you burn Blu-ray discs using Windows Vista and XP, plus Mac OS X Leopard and Tiger.

Disappointing for Mac users, though, is that while the drive comes with Mac-compatible burning software, it doesn't include anything for movie playback, as this isn't yet supported on the Mac platform.

CHOICE VERDICT

If you just want to watch Blu-ray movies, it's still cheaper to buy a standalone Blu-ray lounge-room player or a PlayStation 3 (\$699), which has a built-in Blu-ray player. But if you want high-capacity removable backup, the LACIE d2 Blu-ray drive will give you virtually endless storage.

For the full story on the LACIE d2 Blu-ray recordable drive, see the Nov/Dec 2008 issue of CHOICE

Computer. To subscribe, call 1800 069 552 toll-free or go to choice.com.au/magazines. ■

Lacie d2 Blu-ray recordable drive

Price \$799
Contact www.lacie.com.au

+ EMERGENCY PHONE CHARGER

Recharge anywhere

When you hit the road this little charger could become an essential travelling companion.



UNIROSS Emergency Two Way Charger

Price \$25 Contact www.uniross.com.au

If you're a gadget-laden traveller you need never run out of juice with this emergency charger.

Keeping your mobile phone or MP3 player charged when you're travelling can be a hassle, especially when you're in remote areas away from a convenient power point. The UNIROSS Emergency Two Way Charger offers a solution for the gadget-laden traveller. It uses two AA batteries (alkaline or rechargeable) to charge certain phones, PDAs, MP3 players and similar devices, and can also — as its 'Two Way' name suggests — charge rechargeable AA batteries.

The charger has a telescoping body (for storage) with a USB port. It comes with a connector cable and six connector heads — Nokia V1 and V2, Sony Ericsson, Samsung, Motorola and USB — and basic but adequate instructions. It has a three-year warranty.

The charger is very easy to use. You simply slide it open, put in the batteries and connect the cable to its USB port. To charge a phone or other device, you connect it to

the other end of the cable using the appropriate connector head and set the in/out switch to 'out' so current flows out of the charger. The indicator light glows green to show the unit is charging the phone.

To charge AA batteries, you connect the charger via USB cable to a power source such as a computer, and set the switch to 'in'. The indicator light glows red to show that the unit is charging the batteries. However, it doesn't indicate when they're fully charged, so you need to follow the timing guide in the instructions to ensure you don't overcharge the batteries. For example, it recommends 14 hours to charge two 2100 mAh Ni-MH batteries.

We used the charger to charge a completely flat battery in a Nokia 6680 phone, which would normally charge in up to two hours using a mains adaptor. It took 170 minutes using Uniross Hybrio (precharged) 2100 mAh rechargeable batteries and 210 minutes using Energizer Max batteries. Charging the phone almost completely drained the Uniross batteries and completely drained the Energizers. We then used the charger to recharge the drained Uniross batteries (for 14 hours, as per the instructions), then used them to charge the phone again; this time it took 180 minutes.

CHOICE VERDICT

The UNIROSS Emergency Two Way Charger is a useful addition to your travel kit — your phone, PDA, MP3 player and rechargeable AA batteries need never run out of juice. ■

Coming

Fridges

Buying a new fridge is a major decision so you want to get it right. Our report gives you the lowdown on the best performers for temperature, energy efficiency and ease of use, plus useful information on features and specifications.



Navigation systems

In our latest car GPS test we put 14 models through their paces in the city and the country, then assessed their screen quality, how easy they are to use, how well they give verbal instructions and whether they can find points of interest. The results were surprising. Some systems are packed with features so we help you work out which ones are more useful than others.



Health grills

These kitchen appliances can cook meat or double as a sandwich press. The eight models tested all have non-stick surfaces to help you reduce the amount of oil you use in cooking, and one of our top performers was the least expensive model in the test.

Email or write — we want to hear from you.

Your experiences help our research and often let other readers know about scams and rip-offs. Positive outcomes you've had to a complaint you took to a manufacturer, retailer, importer or tradesperson interest us too. See opposite for how to contact us.

Bells on bikes

■ In your article on bikes for transport in the July 2008 edition, listed under *Bike transport essentials* is a bell. Where are they, and who uses them these days? 'Non-existent' and 'nobody' in my experience.

Having several times been almost knocked down by bicycle riders on suburban footpaths, I write to express my concern at the serious pedestrian safety risk posed by bike riders who don't warn of their approach. With shared pedestrian/bike paths gaining popularity, it's high time this simple, effective device became mandatory in fitment and use.

Neil, NSW



CHOICE says Bells on bicycles are mandatory in most states, including NSW, but some cyclists may avoid using one, perhaps thinking it's impolite. Bicycle Victoria recommends that on shared pedestrian/bike paths, cyclists should keep to the left unless overtaking, slow down and give way to people on foot and ring the bell to alert them of their approach, calling 'passing'. But pedestrians, too, need to consider others and exercise caution while walking on shared paths, especially when using mobile phones and portable media players, which can distract them and block out warning sounds.

Credit card scanned twice

■ I went to a BP petrol station in the eastern suburbs of Victoria. I paid with my credit card, which was swiped, but then the attendant swiped it again on a small skimmer-like machine attached to the cash register, in full view of me.



When I asked what he was doing, I was told he was "clearing the transaction" and, when I said I hadn't seen this done anywhere else, that they "do this all the time at BP".

I then called BP head office, where I was told that the first terminal is the cash side, where the money is taken, and the second terminal is for data and information download, which downloads information so the card can be traced in case there's a dispute about payment.

Is this legal? Can an organisation collect your information without your approval? As far as I'm aware, your credit card can be traced the first time through the banks, so what is the second swipe for? Is it to develop mailing lists?

Jacqui, Victoria

CHOICE says BP told us that at the service stations it owns and operates (about 250), credit cards are only swiped once through an integrated EFTPOS system. However, the vast majority of BP-branded service stations (about another 1150) are independently owned and operated and may swipe cards a second time for internal accounting purposes.

The service station in question pointed out that only the credit card number is retained (not the expiry date or the customer's name) in the second swipe, and only until final account reconciliation at the end of the day, after which only the card number's first four digits are kept.

While this trader's practice, as described above, isn't in blatant breach of the provisions of the Privacy Act, it's certainly not in the spirit. **CHOICE** thinks it's exposing consumers to a higher fraud risk — for more on this, see the article on page 16.

Organisations are generally only allowed to collect personal information that's necessary for their functions or activities, and they must destroy or

'de-identify' it once it's no longer needed. But they must also tell the person why this information is collected, what it'll be used for and to whom it'll be disclosed.

The banks we contacted don't endorse the double-swipe practice either. "It is not the market norm," the Commonwealth Bank said, "a second swipe is considered a superfluous process." According to NAB, "The industry as a whole is working with merchants to eliminate this practice." NAB added that the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI DSS) doesn't specifically prohibit the storage of the PAN (Primary Account Number), only the capture and storage of the full contents of the magnetic stripe.

To be on the safe side, think twice about buying from traders whose practices could expose you to a higher level of risk. Seeing someone swipe your card twice should always start your alarm bells ringing, as your card data may be 'skimmed' (copied illegally). So try to keep an eye on your card at all times, always check your account statements and dispute any duplicated or unauthorised transactions. And if you're concerned about the way in which an organisation collects or handles your information, contact the Office of the Australian Privacy Commissioner (www.privacy.gov.au) for advice on how to make a complaint (1300 363 992).

Refund or replacement?

■ I'm concerned about advice currently being given to consumers and retailers by the Queensland Office of Fair Trading (OFT).

I had only worn a garment once when the seam tore, so I contacted the retailer for a refund. They told me that according to advice from the OFT, they had the right to offer me a replacement for a faulty product,



if that's what they preferred. They had no issue with the product being faulty or not. I didn't want a replacement, but that was all the retailer would offer me.

When I contacted the OFT I was told that the retailer was correct: I couldn't insist on a refund when returning faulty goods. While I was entitled to a refund, credit or replacement, which one of those had to be mutually agreed with the retailer. This seems to me to be completely at odds with the concept of an 'entitlement'.

I subsequently obtained a refund from the retailer, but only after I sent them a photocopied extract from the OFT's publication, which clearly states that I was entitled to a refund.

Please help clarify the situation for future consumers and retailers who rely on the advice given by the OFT phone hotline.
Susannah, Queensland

CHOICE says Unfortunately the matter isn't clear-cut — it's a question of degree and depends on the circumstances. The Queensland Office of Fair Trading said the standard advice given by its phone operators is correct: "Consumers are legally entitled to a refund, exchange, repair or repeat service at no charge (depending on the circumstances) from the place of purchase, if goods or services have a fault..." For example:

- If purchased goods aren't of merchantable quality (for instance, if a garment has a bleach mark on it), the purchaser is entitled to withdraw from the contract and recover damages, which could include a refund or a replacement, if offered and they agree.
- If a garment develops a fault (such as stitching coming undone) after only being worn for a short time, the purchaser isn't entitled to withdraw from the contract, but could recover damages, which would include the cost of repair of the stitching. "The seller may after negotiation be prepared to offer a refund or replacement goods, but the consumer could not enforce a refund."

Thumbs up!

■ Robbert Koppers is very impressed with the prompt service he received from Rest Rite in Archerfield, Queensland, which picked up, fixed and returned a three- or four-year-old latex mattress that had developed a sagging problem — all within a few days of him contacting the company for advice.

■ What do you do when you can't assemble a lamp, but the shop you bought it from is more than 600 km away? Beacon Lighting at Hornsby, Sydney, made do with an emailed photo of the assembly problem and promptly delivered a new lamp to Gwen and David Hall's door.

■ Paul Gioia gives a Thumbs up! to the double-glazing window company Rylock, which fixed and serviced — free of charge — all his windows that were five years old and out of warranty.

■ About a year ago, Maxwell Electronic Service of Kirrawee, Sydney, managed to repair Murray Scott's five-year-old JVC video camera after it had been dropped on the ground. But he feared "the end was nigh" when the recorded picture recently degenerated to horizontal streaks. "Imagine my surprise to have the diagnosis fee refunded, a new CCD board installed and working perfectly, free of charge, as a gesture of goodwill, courtesy of JVC."

Address your letters to **Thumbs up!** at the address below.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Eggs: the forgotten heroes

■ Great egg story (CHOICE, July 2008), but there's a valid option you didn't provide — backyard chickens. I've had four chickens now for five months and have received enough eggs each week (it's slowed down in winter) to keep a family of four supplied, and I can guarantee the quality, as I know what's going in and what exercise the chooks get.

There are lots of added benefits but the one I am proudest of is our neighbours now supply us with a ready supply of their kitchen scraps in return for our spare eggs. It's a great excuse to talk with neighbours.

Kevin Jones

CHOICE says Good point. Just be aware of any regulations that might apply to keeping chooks in your backyard — check with your local council.

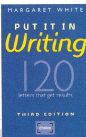
To thank you for taking the time to write to us, CHOICE awards a prize of a CHOICE book to the 'Letter of the month'. This month's winner receives *Put It In Writing*, or any other book of his choice from the list on choice.com.au/books. We're sorry we don't have the resources to answer all your letters personally, and in the magazine we may edit them or print only an extract.



Email ausconsumer@choice.com.au or mail to:
Letters, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204



PHOTO COURTESY OF KEVIN



10 threats to your good name

Nearly half a million Australians were victims of identity fraud last year, and the threats — especially online — are multiplying. So how can you protect yourself?



nutshell

- ID fraud risks, particularly over the internet, are growing fast. 60% of people are worried they'll be caught out.
- There's no way to completely protect your identity, but there are steps you can take to reduce the risks.

When Anne (not her real name) tried to renew her passport recently, she found that someone else had already obtained one in her name. "I had to go through the process of proving that I was the real Anne," she says. "I needed to produce documents going back to school. After about three weeks the new passport was issued. But the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Australian Federal Police couldn't tell me who had stolen my identity or where they'd been [while using my passport]. It still hangs over me — I don't know who this person is that's been using my name."

Anne was just one of the estimated 499,500 victims of identity fraud in Australia last year. There were 383,000 incidences of credit or bank card fraud, while 124,000 people had their identities stolen. Like Anne, many don't know how the criminals got their details or whether their names and personal information are still being used.

'Click happy' threats multiplying

For fraudsters, internet identity theft provides high rewards at low risk, which is attractive for organised crime, including syndicates from eastern Europe and Asia. Experts say the internet was designed perfectly for fraudsters, enabling identity theft on an industrial scale. A thriving market for personal information allows criminals to trade credit card data through 'carding' sites that traffic this information around the world. The US Secret Service estimates that the current two largest carding sites are used by nearly 20,000 criminals.

'Click-happy' consumers opening email attachments, following links to fake websites and even visiting legitimate websites are unwittingly installing spyware and other malicious programs designed to steal their private details and pass them to criminals. The revenue generated by cyber-crime around the world is estimated

to be higher than that of the illicit drug trade. Identity fraud in Australia is worth at least \$1 billion annually.

A recent survey by the Office of the Privacy Commissioner found that 60% of people are worried about being a victim of ID theft. Very little information is needed to steal your identity: your name, date of birth and address can get the ball rolling.

It's not easy to restore your identity, once stolen, so prevention is better than cure. We've identified some of the latest threats and what you can do to avoid them.

Did you know?

The **National Privacy Principles** say governments and organisations must take reasonable steps to protect information they hold from misuse, loss, unauthorised access, modification and disclosure. Appropriate security requirements must be in place to ensure breaches don't occur, and organisations must be accountable when breaches do occur.

However, that accountability doesn't extend to telling the individuals affected, the Privacy Commissioner or police about the theft. The Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) has proposed a change to the Privacy Act whereby agencies and organisations would be required to notify individuals of any intended or unauthorised disclosure of their personal information.

"This alerts individuals to the possibility that they may be at risk of identity theft and may assist them to prevent the theft of their personal information," the ALRC paper says. The ALRC's final report for the Privacy Inquiry is expected to be tabled in parliament soon. By the time legal amendments are discussed, reviewed and redrafted, law reform can take years. In the meantime, the Privacy Commissioner has proposed an opt-in system, whereby signatory organisations voluntarily agree to notify individuals of such security thefts and breaches. Go to privacy.gov.au for details.

Top 10 ID fraud risks



► Surfing the web

Google's analysis of 4.5 million websites in 2007 found that 10%, or 450,000 websites, contained malicious code. While you'll often avoid this by having up-to-date anti-

virus software and by being careful about which links and pop-ups you click on, in some cases just by visiting a site you could unwittingly install software that records your keystrokes or steals sensitive information. Google calls this 'drive-by downloading' and says there's no way for average computer users to protect themselves from this threat. "The victims are completely unaware of the ghost in their browsers and don't know that their keystrokes and other confidential transactions are at risk of being observed by remote adversaries."

What to do Keep your anti-virus software up to date. Be judicious about the websites you visit — reputable companies are more likely to have good security systems that protect users. But there are no guarantees.



► Company databases

Your details are likely to be on at least 100 databases — government agencies, financial institutions, employers, social clubs, retailers, loyalty schemes, video libraries,

airlines ... the list is endless. But how safe is that information? What's to stop hackers stealing it, or unethical employees selling your details, for example?

Bulk theft of identities from large databases is attractive to hackers. In August 2008, the US Department of Justice charged 11 people from five different countries with the theft and sale of more than 40 million credit and debit card numbers. The criminals had used 'war driving' — cruising around in cars with laptops looking for accessible wireless networks to hack into and steal details from.

This follows US retailer TJ Stores (which includes the discount department store TJ Maxx) confirming in 2007 that account information for 45.7 million credit card and debit cards, and 450,000 records containing customers' names, driver's licence and social security numbers, were stolen from its systems by internet fraudsters. The perpetrators had access to the data over 17 months. US banks claim that 94 million accounts were accessed as a result of the theft. TJ Stores doesn't know who the intruder was, or whether there was more than one.

If your details were stolen from a database in this country, you might never know — until you were

499,500

people were victims of identity fraud in Australia last year. 383,000 were victims of credit or bank card fraud; 124,000 were victims of identity theft. Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics.

defrauded or your identity was hijacked. Australian organisations are not required to inform customers or a regulator of such data thefts (see *Did you know?*, far left).

What to do Read companies' privacy statements to check how your information will be used — it's worth the few minutes it takes. Opt out of allowing your details to be passed to third parties and marketing companies, providing more opportunity for ID theft. Only give the information that companies really need to know.



► Malware

As soon as you connect to the internet, you're at risk from attack from malicious software. A recent survey found that 23% of PCs are infected. Malware, or malicious software, is a security threat to the internet economy, according to an OECD report. Malware takes many forms, including:

- **Trojan** A program that appears legitimate but can get around security measures to carry out attacks.
- **Virus** A hidden program that spreads by infecting another program.
- **Keylogger** Software that records the information you punch into your computer, and forwards it to fraudsters. Keyloggers aren't detected by many anti-virus software programs.
- **'Malvertising'** Ads, even on reputable and legitimate sites, can have a malicious purpose, hiding dangerous code that installs trojans, viruses and spyware if you click on them.
- **Spyware** This sends information to a third-party computer without your permission or knowledge.

What to do

- Keep your anti-virus software and firewall up to date.
- Install spyware scanners.
- Conduct regular scans of your computer; some security programs allow 'real-time' protection, a monitoring system that recommends actions against spyware when it's detected.
- Don't click on pop-ups and banner ads unless you trust the source. One dangerous example is being prompted to click on a link to scan your PC for viruses, but when you do, a virus is installed. >

As soon as you connect to the internet you're at risk from attack, but there are ways to safeguard your identity.

Top 10 ID fraud risks



► Phishing

Victims are tricked into revealing personal details through 'social engineering' — deceptive emails and fake websites that look just like the real thing. Major banks have

been targeted, with fake emails leading consumers to websites that capture passwords and account details. Phishing has been around for at least five years but is still going strong. Criminals can even buy 'Phishing attack kits' over the internet. New types of phishing include:

- **Pharming** The collection of personal information en masse via fake websites carefully crafted to appear genuine.
- **SMiShing** This uses mobile phone SMS (text messages) to phish for information.
- **Vishing** Uses voice over internet technology.
- **Spear-phishing** Victims receive an email that seems to be from a trusted source, such as their employer's IT department, asking for personal information or a password confirmation. One of the latest examples of this social engineering is where people receive an email saying they've been subpoenaed to attend court — when they open the attachment for more details, malware is installed.

What to do Be wary of emails with links to websites such as banks, eBay, employment sites, PayPal — really any site asking for personal or financial information. Banks don't ask for personal details via email. Rather than clicking on a link, type the correct website address into your browser — some links aren't what they appear.



► Social networking sites

Consumer Affairs Victoria says the craze for social networking sites, such as Facebook and MySpace, has led to a new generation of scammers. Spammers are using

Facebook to spread unwanted links to online shops, bogus lotteries and financial scams.

The Privacy Commissioner sees social networking websites as one of the greatest challenges to online privacy. "My office found that many people, particularly youth, tend to treat sites such as MySpace as a diary and think, for example, that only close friends are reading it, when this is often not the case," the Privacy Commissioner says. "Identity theft may not necessarily involve the theft of your money, but others getting your details and logging into your social networking

page and vandalising it or sending out messages in your name."

What to do Restrict the details you post online and use settings that keep your details private. Recently, the birthdates of Facebook members were published on the internet, after a programming flaw (which has since been fixed). The AFP says such sites are a fertile ground for harvesting identity information. It warns of the risks of, putting up details such as your date of birth and photos and encourages members to ensure that people they're interacting with are genuine 'friends'.



► Web 2.0

This term describes the internet's evolution to a phase of increased information sharing and collaboration among participants.

Its features include user-generated content, blogs, social networking and wikis. But Web 2.0 brings new risks. Some websites don't have adequate security systems to prevent users from inserting malicious coding into web pages, exposing all site visitors to the risks. Google says user-contributed content is one of the four most prevalent mechanisms used to inject malicious content into popular websites.

Security experts are also concerned. "Blogs and wikis create the perfect environment for fraud attacks," says Nick Ellsmore of IT security company SIFT. Graham Ingram of AusCERT agrees. "If we can't secure what we have now, what will happen with Web 2.0?"

What to do Think twice before following the links from blogs and user-generated content. Sites that allow anonymous posts are often riskier. CHOICE Online allows anonymous posts, but not links embedded in the text.



► Credit card skimming

Staff at retailers, restaurants and petrol stations sometimes use small devices to illegally copy information from a card's magnetic strip. This information can be transferred to a

blank card and taken on a spending spree.

What to do

- Don't let your card out of your sight.
- Make sure it's not scanned twice, or by a suspicious looking terminal.
- Go through your statements with a fine-toothed comb, and report strange transactions immediately; if you weren't at fault, the financial institution should reimburse you after it investigates.

Most people don't take the necessary steps to protect their identity, even after they've been victims.



► Your mail and waste

Fraudsters pay people to go through bins looking for letters, bills, pre-approved credit card offers and bank statements. Cheques and credit cards are often stolen from letterboxes too.

Mail theft is a common way to steal identities, says the AFP.

What to do

- Get a lock for your letterbox, and use it.
- A good personal paper shredder costs \$50–\$150.
- A pair of scissors costs less.



► Spam

Only one in 28 emails is legitimate, according to IT security company Sophos. The rest are spam, and may include dangerous code, links and attachments. If installed, this code

can steal details or turn your computer into a 'bot' that attacks other computers, passing the stolen details to the original fraudster. "Email spam is almost always sent from innocent third-party computers which have been hijacked by hackers," says Sophos. "These botnet computers are owned by innocent parties, unaware that cybercriminals are using them for financial gain. Typically they are home users who haven't been properly protected with up-to-date anti-virus software, firewalls and security patches."

What to do

- Install spam filtering software.
- Don't open attachments or click on links unless you trust the source of the email. Attachments with these file extensions should set alarm bells ringing: .exe, .com, .pif, .scr, .vbs, .js, .ocx, .shs, .reg and .bat.



► E-commerce

64% of Australians use e-commerce — to buy books, travel, tickets, etc. But the conveniences mask a serious vulnerability, as criminals obtain credit card numbers en masse from

merchants' databases, without customers knowing. 'Card not present' fraud, where criminals present stolen customer details online, accounts for most of the 380,000 card fraud victims in Australia each year.

What to do

- Always look for the security padlock symbol on e-commerce and internet banking sites. Don't enter credit card details unless you see the padlock.
- Never provide card details in reply to an email.
- Never provide your ATM PIN over the internet. >

A victim of ID theft

When Jim emigrated from England to WA, he held on to his English credit card for use during trips back to the UK and some internet purchases. Some time later, he received a letter from the provider, Barclaycard, about suspected fraud on the card.

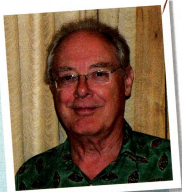
"Barclaycard wouldn't give me any details at first. It was only with probing that they admitted it involved an online flower company," Jim says. "I'd sent flowers to my Mum through a company that I'd used a few times successfully. Then another flower company with a different name contacted me by email asking for my full credit card details, including the three-digit security code, to process the transaction. I became suspicious and cancelled the order."

Later, the bank confirmed that Jim's credit card details had been stolen. It identified that transactions on the card didn't fit his usual spending pattern, including several items costing over £1000 and the purchase of dozens of £10 and £30 telephone calling cards.

"The crooks had advised Barclaycard that I'd moved back to the UK, and they provided Barclaycard with an address for me in East London. They then increased my credit card limit and proceeded to spend about \$15,000 in computer shops around the UK. I was totally unaware of this, of course, because the statements were not coming to my address."

Although Jim wasn't liable for these fraudulent transactions, he was surprised and annoyed that Barclaycard had allowed the change of address without his signature. He'll also think twice about buying flowers over the internet in the future.

"Barclaycard told me that it's relatively easy for crooks to get hold of personal information such as address, date of birth and mother's maiden name."



► Criminals assumed Jim's identity, told his bank he'd emigrated and redirected his credit card statements to a false address. Then they took his card on a spending spree.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JIM



HOW TO PROTECT YOUR ID

According to a survey by Veda Advantage (one of the companies that holds consumers' credit records), most people don't take the necessary steps to protect their identity from theft, even after they've been victims. We could probably fill a magazine with the tips for protecting your identity, but briefly, here are some important ones:

- Practise safe computing.
- Check your credit file regularly. It's free if you're prepared to wait 10 days; there's a fee if you're in a hurry (see *Useful contacts*, page 16).
- Safeguard documents — ensure your postbox is locked, and shred bank statements and letters.
- Make sure your credit and bank statements are received, and check they're correct.
- Report problems to the authorities.

For more information, check out the government's ID theft toolkit on the Attorney General's website (type 'identity fraud' in the search box at www.ag.gov.au).

In Australia there's no single place to go to clear your name — you'll need to devote a lot of time to fixing the problem.

Restoring your good name

A UK government report found that clearing your name after an identity theft can take months of work — the victim could need to spend close to 50 hours. Where a total 'identity hijack' has occurred, involving 20 to 30 organisations, the victim could need to spend more than 200 hours and £8000 (more than \$16,000) before things are back to normal.

In Australia, there's no single place you can go — you'll need to devote a lot of time to fixing the problem.

- Contact your bank and other financial institutions. You may need to change passwords and PINs, stop payment on lost and stolen cheques, and even close your accounts.
- Report the identity theft to the police.
- Notify credit reporting agencies (see *Useful contacts*, below), put a fraud alert on your credit file and check the file is accurate.
- Contact agencies such as your local post office (to ask whether mail has been diverted), Centrelink and the Australian Passport Office.

Taking these steps won't guarantee your problems are over — once your details are stolen, you've no way of knowing whose hands they're in, or how they're being used.

The Privacy Commissioner says, "With a piece of jewellery, the thief may try to sell the item. End of story. With a stolen identity, the consequences can be far less obvious, with the thief using the information to perpetrate further crimes, sometimes over months or years. The virtual footprints one leaves are often difficult to erase and it is impossible to know who will have access to your information down the track." ■

244,803,916

records containing sensitive personal information have been involved in security breaches in the US from January 2005 to 15 September 2008. Source: Privacy Rights Clearing House, a not-for-profit consumer organisation.

USEFUL CONTACTS

- The Privacy Commissioner: privacy.gov.au. To check your credit file, you should contact all the relevant organisations:
- Dun and Bradstreet, 13 23 33, dnb.com.au.
- Veda Advantage, 1300 762 207, mycreditfile.com.au.
- Tasmanian Collection Service: 03 6213 5599, tascol.com.au [Tasmanians only].

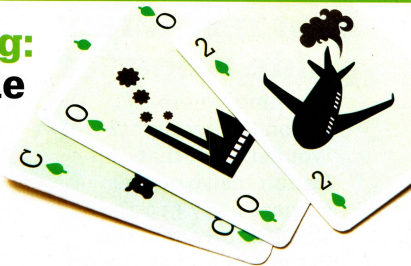
WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

Most of us probably don't take the possibility or the consequences of identity fraud very seriously — but the experts CHOICE spoke to certainly do.

- "Treat your identity like cash, because if you don't, your identity will be turned into cash." **Warren Gray**, National Manager, Economic Operations, Australian Federal Police.
- "Credit card fraud results in an immediate, but temporary, financial loss. Identity theft is much more serious as the effects may be long term and go beyond pure financial loss. When somebody has stolen your identity, they can take out a mortgage, have credit cards issued and commit crimes, all in your name." **Dan Svantesson**, Associate Professor of Law at Bond University and Australian Privacy Foundation board member.
- "Hacking of databases containing personal information is definitely a big threat to privacy. But there are also other ways to steal somebody's identity. With the amount of sensitive personal information people voluntarily make available on online networking websites, such as MySpace and Facebook, they may become vulnerable to identity theft." **Dan Svantesson**.
- "E-commerce spending is growing at three to four times the rate of offline spending, and this is very attractive to organised crime." **Nick Ellsmore**, CEO of IT security company SIFT.
- "If the malicious code has installed a back door, gained administrator level access or changed system files, then the integrity (not to mention confidentiality or availability) of your system has been fundamentally damaged. This means you can no longer trust the operating system, applications or data files." **AusCERT**, Australia's national 'Computer Emergency Response Team', a not-for-profit team of IT security professionals based at the University of Queensland.
- "It's a very sophisticated full-service economy." **Graham Ingram** of AusCERT, talking about trafficking of credit card and other personal data over the internet.
- "The time has come to treat our identities as seriously as our car keys or house keys." **Stephen Wilson**, Lockstep Consulting, a company that helps organisations with 'identity management', including combating identity fraud.
- "Old-style fraud requires more effort and greater risk. In a connected world, fraud is easier, faster and has fewer barriers to entry," says **Benn Dullard** of Eunexus, a consultant specialising in online banking fraud prevention. "Fraud occurs across multiple products. It can be very difficult to identify the original point of compromise."

Emissions trading: a beginner's guide

Most of us believe a carbon emissions trading scheme is necessary, but don't know what it will mean to our wallet.



nutshell

► The proposed Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme is likely to increase consumer costs, including electricity.
► You can reduce greenhouse gas emissions and cut energy bills at the same time by improving your household's energy efficiency.
► CHOICE wants the scheme to be complemented by government support for households to become more efficient.

The concept of an emissions trading scheme (ETS) has been on the edge of consumer consciousness for the past year. In a July *Herald*/Nielsen opinion poll, 68% of respondents said they were prepared to pay more for goods and services to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but nearly 60% of respondents had little to no understanding of how an emissions trading scheme would work — even though two-thirds of respondents supported the introduction of one. Clearly, there's strong grassroots support for reducing emissions. What's also needed fast is a broad increase in understanding what's involved, so consumers aren't taken advantage of in their enthusiasm.

What is an ETS?

Both industry and consumers pay nothing to emit greenhouse gas pollution (known as carbon pollution). There's no incentive to avoid emissions, nor to develop less polluting alternatives. The government has announced it will introduce an ETS, called the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, which will put a price on every unit of carbon emission from big polluters. This makes it more attractive for the market to look for cleaner options.

Under the proposed scheme, there would be a limit, or a 'cap', on the amount of greenhouse gases our biggest polluters can emit. The government would decide the total acceptable level of pollution in advance and make available a limited number of tradable units called 'permits'. Businesses that are large emitters (over 25,000 tonnes of greenhouse gases a year) will be required to present a permit for each tonne of pollution they emit in a given year.

Emissions trading encourages industry to find the cheapest ways to cut pollution, by allowing trading of permits in a market. Some companies will find it easier to become greener. Because they cut their pollution, they won't have to buy as many permits or will even have excess carbon permits they can sell to companies that find it more difficult to cut pollution. Regardless of who's doing the work of cutting pollution, the overall target level of pollution is still met. ■

HOW WILL YOU BE AFFECTED?

The introduction of the scheme will affect the prices of goods and services — goods that create more carbon pollution during production will become more expensive. The idea is that an ETS will encourage consumers to support businesses that can produce goods and services that are less emissions-intensive — and therefore cheaper.

The government estimates that the scheme will create a largely one-off increase in costs, like the introduction of the GST. Assuming a carbon emission price of \$20 per tonne, it would cause a CPI increase of approximately 0.9%. Consumers will also pay for the cost of carbon pollution via higher electricity bills, so we'll be encouraged to become more energy-efficient in our households to reduce costs.

It's important for the government to ensure that higher costs aren't borne disproportionately by low-income households. Low-income earners will receive assistance through either the tax or family payment system to meet additional expenses, and it's expected that middle-income earners will also receive some assistance.

The scheme will also affect the cost of other products as energy costs will increase for the companies that manufacture, distribute and sell them. To help households adjust, the government has announced its intention to initially cut fuel taxes on a cent-for-cent basis — for every cent fuel prices increase because of an ETS, fuel taxes will be cut by a cent. It also plans to increase payments to pensioners, carers and other welfare recipients to compensate for the higher costs of living.

CHOICE says that additional policies and protection to help consumers manage cost increases and improve energy efficiency must be in place before the scheme starts. And the ACCC will have to ensure that businesses don't seek government compensation, make profits from permit trading and pass on unfairly high prices to consumers.

For CHOICE's *Energy and Equity Report*, information on how we're campaigning for a fair ETS, plus links to information on how to reduce your carbon costs, go to choice.com.au/climatechange.

Best restaurant guide websites

Deciding where to eat on Friday night? Wondering if that Italian bistro on the corner is any good? CHOICE presents the inaugural Mouse Awards for the best restaurant guide websites.



nutshell

► For the CHOICE Mouse Awards, we checked out popular restaurant guide websites and rated them.
► What makes a good restaurant review website and how can you judge the quality of the reviews? Find out here.

A vast improvement on trawling the phone book, online restaurant guides can be a great help when planning a meal out. Some give you not only names, addresses and cuisine, but also menus, ambience photos and reviews. So when you're dining with friends who've a penchant for Swiss-Malay fusion, or you're visiting another town or city, they're an ideal place to start.

But which ones offer the most useful information, and how do you know which reviews you can trust? To find out, we let our fingers do the walking — the new way.

What makes a good online restaurant guide?

First and foremost, information should be **up-to-date and accurate**. For this, most online restaurant guides rely on restaurants to manage their own listings, and for diners to alert the site manager to out-of-date information. Lists of recently opened eateries are also useful.

Other desirable features include:

Comprehensive coverage of restaurants and cafés.

Vital information Address, phone number, website link, cuisine, opening hours, BYO/licensing information, number of seats (to give you an idea of how big the restaurant is), an indication of prices (such as a range for main meal prices). High-end restaurants might also include the name of the chef.

Menus are very useful if they're current. A link to the restaurant's own website, complete with menu, is an alternative (and chances are it will be more up to date).

Nearby restaurants, cafés and bars Some sites suggest these, which is great if you want to know where to go for drinks before dinner or for coffee and dessert.

Reviews Good ones include the day, date and meal type (breakfast, lunch, dinner) of the visit, as well as the

date the review was posted. Reviews from traditionally busy nights (Friday or Saturday, Valentine's Day) versus quieter nights can give different impressions of service.

Phone info Some sites offer to send details to your mobile phone, which saves you writing it down, and you can forward the information to friends.

Versatility when searching You might want to find a particular cuisine, or a selection of restaurants in a suburb (including surrounding suburbs). You might be after a certain ambience (lively, romantic), fancy water views or outside dining. Many sites offer most or all of these search options.

Independence Most online restaurant guides allow restaurants to list with them free of charge. Revenue for the websites comes from restaurants seeking priority placements and advertising (usually these ads aren't for restaurants). Does paying to be featured get you a better review? We didn't necessarily find that to be true — featured restaurants tended to have mixed reviews as often as any other restaurant. The exception is websites that mostly publish positive reviews anyway.

Case study: When is Shangri-la not?

Melbourne foodies might be surprised to learn that their city's best food comes not from the 2008 *Good Food Guide's* 'Restaurant of the Year', Rockpool Bar & Grill, nor Vue de Monde, one of this year's three-hatters. Rather, according to one online guide, it's the little-known Shangri-La Inn, a Malaysian restaurant located in a suburban shopping centre. The one person who reviewed it had a good time and rated it accordingly — a perfect five out of five.

Reviews of busy nights versus quieter nights can give different impressions of service.

Does that mean the Shangri-La Inn offers the best dining experience in Melbourne? Is it the foodie heaven, or indeed Shangri-la, of fine dining? Reviews we found for it on other sites were warm and positive, but somehow lacked the superlatives of reviews for other great eateries.

Conversely, do Rockpool (scoring 3.6/5 on the same online guide) and Vue de Monde (3.8/5) deserve their comparatively mediocre ratings, or have just a couple of disgruntled diners pushed their ratings south?

You'll find various kinds of reviews in restaurant guides, including critics' reviews, editorial overviews, reviews from the dining public and a restaurant's own overviews. Whose opinions you can rely on will depend not only on the integrity of the review, but also on what you want from a restaurant.

Restaurant reviews: Reading between the lines

It should already be obvious from the case study above that the review of one diner shouldn't be regarded as gospel — especially if that one person's only eaten one meal at the reviewed place (or is a relative of the owner). The more reviews the merrier — there are lots of reasons for people having different opinions of a restaurant, including different expectations, the staff on the day, the food ordered (and, of course, subjectivity is a major player here) and the day of the visit (Fridays and Saturdays are likely to be much busier than other nights, while quiet nights can lack buzz and atmosphere).

We like Eatability's approach, where reviewers are encouraged to use the same name each time, and you can read all the reviews by a particular person to see what they've said about other places — perhaps some you've been to — and build up a picture of the kind of reviewer they are (overly harsh or overly generous, for example).

While you might take a single review from a critic more seriously than one from a single 'lay' diner, critics' reviews are subject to their own bias issues. It's widely acknowledged that well-known critics receive special attention from cooking and service staff, which could give them an overly favourable impression. This probably helps explain why other patrons visiting restaurants with lots of hype and hats may end up feeling a little underwhelmed.

On the other hand, critics can be more picky about things that other diners wouldn't notice. Their single review could also be a little old by the time you read it, and many things could have changed since the time of writing. This is why we like Miatta's approach of using critics' reviews from as many sources as possible, often (though not always) including very recent ones. >

HOW WE TESTED

We chose 11 popular restaurants from the state capitals, ranging from cheap to very expensive, and recorded the information provided about the restaurants on each of 17 popular online restaurant guides. The information was assessed for how recent it was, the breadth and depth of coverage, and accuracy of details such as address, phone number and website/email.

We then looked up major regional centres throughout Australia, including some with well-regarded restaurants, and recorded how well the websites covered the restaurants in these centres according to the same criteria used for capital city restaurants.

To see how up to date the sites were, we looked up a restaurant that closed during the test period to see how long this news would take to filter through.

Finally, we searched for all restaurants in particular suburbs to see how many venues each site came up with, and checked that the details were current.

The CHOICE Mouse Awards



In the spirit of the 'Hats' awarded to great restaurants by *The Age* and *The Sydney Morning Herald Good Food* guides, CHOICE is awarding Mouses to the better online restaurant guides (see pages 20–21). See *How we tested*, above, for more on our critiques.

About the rest

As these websites get more and more reviews, they'll become more popular, and get more reviews and become more popular... and so on. Whether or not they'll reach that critical mass, when there are excellent sites already out there, remains to be seen.

The other sites we looked at are:

- Ador.com.au.
- Citysearch (www.citysearch.com.au).
- Eatlocal (www.eatlocal.com.au).
- Melbourne restaurants (www.melbournurerestaurants.com).
- Melbourne Table (www.melbournetable.com.au).
- Menufeast (www.menufeast.com.au).
- Restaurants.com.au.
- Restaurant.org.au.
- Sydneyrestaurants.com.
- True local (www.truelocal.com.au).
- Webmenu (www.webmenu.com.au).

The CHOICE Mouse Awards

Eatability eatability.com.au



What Eatability says "It's great hearing from critics but Eatability gives you the inside information from everyday patrons." **Covers** Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast, Perth, Adelaide and Canberra, as well as regional centres in the corresponding states.

Search by Name, suburb, area, cuisine, venue (café, bar), atmosphere, special diet, special features.

Who provides information Restaurants can list free, and provide as much information as they wish. Reviewers are members of the public.

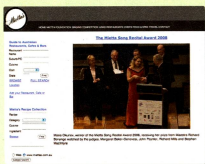
Why CHOICE likes it



- Its popularity means lots of reviews, and this means you get a broad spectrum of opinion and also clear points of consensus.
- It provides numerical ratings and written reviews. It notes how many people have contributed to the ratings, and if there are only a few ratings, the correspondingly less reliable overall rating is marked accordingly.
- Reviewers are encouraged to use the same name each time, and you can read all reviews for a particular person.
- Links to other restaurants and bars nearby, and other restaurants in the same city with similar cuisine.

Room for improvement This site will get even better when reviews for restaurants in recently added cities start coming in.

Mietta's Australian Restaurants, Cafés, Bars, Food and Wine miettass.com.au



What Mietta's says "It gives reasons to visit [restaurants] — not reasons to stay away."

Covers All capitals and also regional areas, with more than 7000 venues on its books.

Search by Name, suburb, area, state, cuisine, price, size, Mietta's awards for food, wine and ambience, and features such as child-friendly or outside seating.

Who provides information As well as its own reviews written by industry professionals, it adds them from reputable sources such as the *Good Food Guide*, *Gourmet Traveller* and major newspapers. There's no input from the dining public.

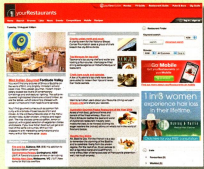
Why CHOICE likes it



- The best of the 'critic only' sites, it's quite comprehensive in the breadth (number of restaurants) and depth (details) of its coverage.
- It's good if you want to see what critics say about a restaurant you have in mind.
- All reviews are sourced and dated, so you know who said what and when.
- Reflecting its mission statement, Mietta's reviews highlight the good points about restaurants, adopting an "if you have nothing nice to say, say nothing" approach. On the other hand...

Room for improvement Sometimes restaurants deserve a harsh word or two. Also, some of the reviews are a few years old, making them rather out of date.

yourRestaurants yourrestaurants.com.au



What yourRestaurants says As well as a restaurant guide, it aims to help you organise your dining-out life, with facilities to put restaurants on your personal 'favourites' and 'wish list' lists.

Covers Australia, including regional towns.

Search by State, area, suburb, cuisine, opening days/hours, various features, including BYO, licensed, vegetarian options, wheelchair access, water views.

Who provides the information Restaurants provide the basic information. There are diner reviews from members of the public and general reviews by freelance writers (not necessarily career restaurant critics).

Why CHOICE likes it



- It contains just about everything you need to know about a restaurant.
- Provides the day, date and time (lunch, dinner, etc) of the review.
- Nearby bars, restaurants and cinemas are listed on each restaurant's page.
- It's associated with yourTime restaurants' mobile phone web service.
- Clear, uncluttered page layout.
- It encourages honest reviews, even if negative.

Room for improvement It doesn't have as many diner reviews as Eatability, especially in NSW, Queensland and Victoria, where Eatability is strongest. On the other hand, it's better than Eatability for information on the ACT, NT, SA, Tasmania and WA. More reviews would make this site great.

De Groots Best Restaurants bestrestaurants.com.au



What Best Restaurants says It claims to be the first national web-based restaurant guide, starting in 1996. You probably won't find your local pizza joint on this site — as its name suggests, it's strongest on the mid to high-end restaurants, though it does cover café-style places with good-quality food. **Covers** Australia, including regional towns. **Search** by Suburb or area, price range, cuisine. The advanced search lets you select for places that are "accessible by seaplane", "in a winery" or "suitable for hens' nights" (though not bucks' nights, interestingly) and other such dining nuances. **Information provided** by Reviews are provided by staff writers. Diners are invited to give their reviews (which the site edits for clarity and to avoid defamatory comments) but this appears to be rarely taken up.

Why CHOICE likes it

- Reviews are professional.
- The site tells you almost everything you need to know about a place with a minimum of fuss and clutter.
- You can get restaurant details sent by SMS.
- Excellent advanced search when you're looking for inspiration.

Room for improvement More than one review would be good, especially since the review can be a few years old. Also, the date of reviews isn't always noted.

EatingWA eatingwa.com.au



What EatingWA says The creators' idea was to provide a restaurant guide that's "simple, informative and stylish". **Covers** WA (though it's linked to OzEating.com.au, which covers other states) **Search** by Suburb (and surrounding suburbs), cuisine and style of dining (including al fresco, bistro, family, buffet). **Who provides the information** Restaurants can list free. Reviews and star ratings are provided by patrons, though sometimes there's also an editorial blurb.

Why CHOICE likes it

- Detailed information about the food is encouraged and reviewers oblige.
- Restaurants will sometimes respond to people's reviews, putting forward their side of the story.

Room for improvement The editors choose which reviews to publish, and make it clear they're not likely to publish negative reviews — something people have commented on to us. We tested the theory by submitting a negative, though honest, review and it wasn't published. However, there are some negative reviews there, so it's not clear why some are published and some aren't.

There's a cyberjungle of foodie bloggers out there — try googling a restaurant's name and chances are you'll find a review.

Menulog menulog.com.au



What Menulog says It claims to be Australia's newest and most comprehensive eating-out guide, covering both dine-in and takeaway services. **Covers** Australia, including regional towns. **Search** by Suburb or area, type of venue (restaurant, café, pub, bar), ambience, price, cuisine. **Who provides the information** Restaurants provide basic information and menus. Excerpts of reviews from critics are published, as well as diner reviews.

Why CHOICE likes it

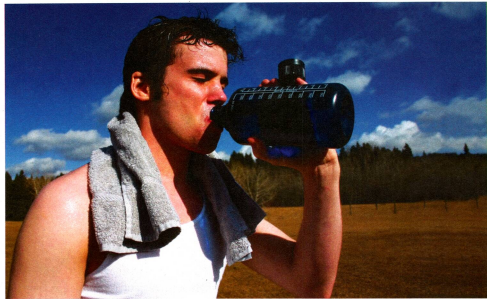
- It tries to include menus, and dates them.
- It has a lot of restaurants on its books.
- As well as giving info about restaurants, Menulog provides an online ordering service for home delivered or takeaway (pick-up) food. You can place your order any time and specify the time (and day) it's required, and all without having to shout over the phone at people in noisy restaurants. There are also reviews for the various aspects of this service.

Room for improvement

The dine-in restaurant information is cluttered and spread over several pages.

We're also sceptical of this rationale for not providing a full review: "This restaurant has also been reviewed by the following reputable critics. In Menulog's opinion, multiple reviews are usually an indication that the restaurant is popular and worth trying yourself."

Hyped to the max



They're selling just a dream. Unless you're an athletic superstar, sports drinks won't make you run faster. They'll merely make you fatter.

nutshell

► If you're not an elite athlete, sports drinks are just another soft drink containing sugar and salt that you don't really need.

► Some brands specifically target kids, but young athletes don't need these drinks.

Sports drinks come with promises that are hard to resist: "Gives you greater energy for a longer more effective performance" ... "Perform at your peak for 10% longer" ... "Formulated to deliver what you need to play hard" and "Compete longer before fatigue."

But when Roger Bannister broke the four-minute mile in 1954 his only sports drink would have been water. So how much is fact and how much mere marketing hype? CHOICE looked at the latest evidence and compared 14 brands of sports drink from supermarkets, service stations and convenience stores (see the table, right).

Water, sugar and salt

Sports drinks have three basic ingredients — water, sugar and salt. When you exercise you lose water as sweat, as much as two litres an hour from strenuous exercise in hot weather. If you sweat more than 2% of your body weight your heart is placed under stress, your body temperature goes up, and your physical and mental performance declines.

Sports drinks' ads are eloquent on the subject of hydration. The sugar and salt they contain are at the right concentrations to maximise the speed with which water moves from your gut into your bloodstream. But plain water is absorbed almost as quickly and is perfectly adequate for moderate exercise or if you're exercising for less than an hour or so. A recent study found no real differences overall between the hydration ability of water and three brands of sports drink. And there's little evidence that one sports drink is better than any other.

Forget about drinking "eight glasses of water a day"

— that's an urban myth. Six glasses (1.5 L) of almost any fluid should be ample. Exactly how much water we need depends on how much we get with our food and how much we lose as sweat.

It's worth noting that the sense of thirst is slow to react to dehydration, so if you're exercising hard in hot conditions it's a good idea to drink before you become thirsty. In fact, you need to drink before, during and after exercise.

Did you know?

Energy drinks — not the same as sports drinks Energy drinks such as RED BULL and V contain caffeine. There's good evidence that caffeine enhances sports performance for elite athletes, but not for the average runner or cyclist.

Energy drinks usually contain more sugar than sports drinks (we've included RED BULL in the table for comparison). A high sugar concentration can slow absorption of water into the body, making these drinks definitely unsuitable for rehydration when you're exercising. And their caffeine makes them unsuitable for children.

No good for a hangover Many people believe a hangover is caused by dehydration, so not surprisingly sports drinks are recommended as a sure-fire cure. According to STAMINADE, "Faster rehydration leads to faster recovery from all activities — from hangovers to marathons." But the latest research suggests this isn't true for hangovers. The miseries of a hangover are more likely caused by effects of alcohol on the immune system. There's really nothing you can do for a hangover except take a painkiller for the headache.

Sugar and exercise

The sugars in sports drinks are also supposed to replenish the fuel you use during exercise. The body stores fuel as carbohydrates in the muscles and the liver, and releases sugar into the bloodstream for instant energy. After prolonged exercise the carbohydrate stores are depleted and blood-sugar levels can drop. Studies have shown that supplying a steady source of sugar during exercise fights off fatigue and enhances performance.

However, this only applies to strenuous exercise for an extended period. It takes about an hour of intense exercise, such as a fast run or hard cycling, before the body depletes its reserves enough to benefit from extra carbohydrates. With lower-intensity exercise, such as jogging, it may take two hours or more. There's evidence that sports drinks can improve performance, but only if you're an elite athlete. If you're simply an active person who jogs, swims or goes to the gym a couple of times a week, you don't need sports drinks.

If you're concerned about putting on weight, it's unlikely that you need extra energy. Our bodies store excess energy as fat. An elite athlete trains for several hours a day, using up plenty of energy. But if you're just going for the odd jog, one bottle of some of the popular brands of sports drink hits you with 9–10 teaspoons of sugar.

In the table we've compared how many minutes' jogging are fuelled by 600 mL of each brand of sports drink for a boy of 12, a woman weighing 60 kg and a man weighing 70 kg. Most brands give you enough fuel for well over 20 minutes of jogging. If you're not exercising for that long, that's sugar (and kilojoules) you don't need.

Salt and fluid balance

Sports drinks contain 'electrolytes' — mostly sodium chloride (ordinary salt) and potassium chloride. Replenishing the body's electrolytes is less important than the ads would have you believe. It's true that sodium, which helps regulate the body's fluid balance and plays a role in muscle contraction, is lost in sweat; to a lesser degree, so is potassium, which is also involved in muscle contraction. But most of us already get too much salt in our diet, so your usual food intake should be more than enough to replace any electrolyte losses. A 600 mL bottle of some sports drinks (including top-selling GATORADE) gives you more than 10% of the maximum recommended daily intake of sodium. ■

KIDS' GAMES

Sports drinks are promoted as better than water for young kids. GATORADE argues that children often arrive at sports underhydrated and its product encourages them to drink more than if they were only offered water. (And there's independent evidence to support this.) But sports drinks are acidic and can erode dental enamel. The salt in sports drinks is even more undesirable for children than it is for adults because children's maximum recommended intake is less (depending on age). Professor Louise Baur, a paediatrician at the Children's Hospital at Westmead, NSW, and director of the University of Sydney's NSW Centre for Overweight and Obesity, says sports drinks are unnecessary for children and adolescents, and their consumption is part of the growing childhood obesity problem.

PRODUCT	NUTRIENTS PER 600 ML			MINUTES OF JOGGING FUELLED PER 600 ML			SPECIFICATIONS	
	Energy (kJ)	Sugar (tsp)	Sodium (% maximum daily intake)	Boy (12 years)	Woman (60 kg)	Man (70 kg)	Bottle size (mL)	Price per bottle (\$)
Brand (ranked by kJ per 600 mL)								
Pumped Lemon Fix	231	3.5	3	8	8	7	750	2.72
Powerade Light Citrus Breeze	275	4	7	10	9	8	600	3.95
Thorpedo Troppo Paradise	367	5.5	5	13	13	11	350	1.25 (B)
Mizone Rapid Raspberry Rush	412	6	6	15	14	12	750	2.87
Gatorade Watermelon	606	9	12	21	21	18	200	0.68 (C)
Adams Ale Sport Orange	630	9.5	7	22	22	18	600	1.89
Gatorade Lemon Lime	631	9	12	22	22	18	600	2.45
100 Plus	684	10	12	24	23	20	330	0.99
Maxade Electrolyte Drink Arctic Rush (Aldi)	727	10	11	26	25	21	600	1.39
Maxade Isotonic Drink Berry Blast (Aldi)	727	10	11	26	25	21	600	1.39
Staminade Orange Burst	738	8.5	8	26	25	22	600	1.75
Powerade Isotonic Wallabies Gold Rush	802	9	7	28	27	23	600	2.63
Powerade Energy Edge (A)	804	9	13	29	27	24	450	2.63
Powerade Recovery Citrus	951	8.5	8	34	32	28	450	2.63
Red Bull (included for comparison)	1152	16	21	41	39	34	250	2.69

USING THE TABLE

Nutrients per 600 mL From the figures provided on the nutrition information panel. Bottle and serve sizes vary, so we've used 600 mL (the most common bottle size) as a basis for comparison — and you'd need to drink at least this much fluid if exercising for about an hour under hot conditions.

Minutes of jogging fuelled per 600 mL We've estimated for how long you'd have to jog to use up the energy (kilojoules) supplied by 600 mL of sports drink if you're a budding young male athlete aged 12, a woman weighing 60 kg or a man weighing 70 kg. These are average values, as individuals vary in their rates of energy expenditure.

Price per bottle Based on prices we paid in Sydney in May 2008.

TABLE NOTES

(A) One bottle (450 mL) contains more caffeine than a cup of coffee; it's not suitable for children.

(B) Bought in a four-pack for \$4.99.

(C) Bought in a six-pack for \$4.10.



Consuming for a cause

When you buy a bottle of water or a pair of earrings where a portion of the sale price goes to a good cause, are you donating to charity or are you being 'causewashed'?

nutshell

► Cause-related marketing is a partnership between a company and a charity, where the charity benefits from the company's marketing budget and the company raises its corporate social responsibility profile.

► For a consumer, it can be a way to make a small contribution to a cause without affecting your bottom line — but make sure you're happy with the product and the price.

It's early Saturday morning when Ms A hits the mall on a mission to do some serious shopping. List in hand, her first stop is the supermarket, where she picks up pancake mix, marshmallows and chocolate for her daughter's birthday party, as well as tinned salmon, toothpaste, shampoo, paper towels and fruit juice for the whole family. She pops into the chemist for painkillers and hairspray before swinging past a boutique where she splurges on a pair of funky earrings and a necklace for herself.

She then heads to the electronics store to buy a cordless phone for the study, before stopping to buy a bunch of flowers for her mum. Exhausted, she makes a final stop at the bakery for a snack before heading for home.

Sounds like a typical day's shopping, but does it sound like donating to charity? Depending on the time of the year and the brands she chooses, Ms A and her shopping spree may have just contributed more than \$20 to causes as diverse as breast cancer research, literacy, ovarian cancer research, returned servicemen, community care and breast cancer support.

How does CRM work?

It's called cause-related marketing (CRM), and it's a business partnership between a company and a charity. While CRM can take many different forms, one of the most common is when a company allies itself with a charity and contributes a portion of the sale price of its product to that cause.

The first high-profile CRM promotion started in 1983 when American Express agreed to donate one cent

Did you know?

Women are the target From jewellery to flowers and babywear to chocolate, it's no coincidence that many products that donate to charity also appeal directly to women. Cause-related marketing consultant Hailey Cavill says women are considered the 'gatekeepers' when it comes to shopping, choosing products for the whole family. As a result, many products and causes that work well in CRM are those that speak to women.

The latest research from the Eye on Australia 2008 project, by global marketing consultancy Grey Worldwide, revealed who the most powerful consumer in the Australian market today is — it is a "40-plus female who has reached her power summit through a combination of not just demographic weight but a growing proportion of earnings and, by inference, spending power," says Paul Gardener, Chairman of Grey Group Australia and New Zealand.

from every purchase made with its card to the fund for the restoration of the Statue of Liberty. The partnership was a resounding success for both parties, raising \$US1.7 million for the cause and increasing American Express card use by 28% and new card applications by 45%. Since then, CRM has increased in popularity, especially in Australia where products claiming to support charities have appeared all over the place in the last few years.

So what's the difference between CRM and straight-out fundraising for a charity? Hailey Cavill, whose

consultancy Cavill + Co specialises in company-cause partnerships, says the main difference is marketing.

She thinks good CRM is an effective way to raise funds, promote the company and engage the consumer. In addition, she says it gives charities an opportunity to raise awareness. "Many charities just don't have a big marketing budget, so if they can jump on board a promotion that's going to a million customers that's great marketing, and then they get the money too. It's about win-win but we shouldn't pretend it's anything more than a marketing strategy that makes everyone feel good."

For the companies involved, CRM has several advantages, if it's done well. A cause campaign can increase sales as well as improve brand recognition, and help to develop customer loyalty. While many large companies may already have foundations that donate money to charity behind the scenes, CRM is a very public way of engaging the customer at the same time as enhancing the reputation of the company.

Paul Henderson, Acting CEO of The Smith Family, says CRM forms part of its overall fundraising mix, which includes appeals, sponsors and business partners. In March 2007, it worked with long-time partner Colgate to raise more than \$100,000 to fund an oral health and healthy eating program. The promotion was simple: for every tube of selected Colgate toothpaste sold, 10 cents of the sale price was donated to the Smith Family. Henderson says the promotion was a success because the cause was specific and a good match. "Most people are going to brush their teeth, and if they can buy a brand of toothpaste they like as well as helping out disadvantaged families, then it's a bonus."

Does shopping replace giving?

While CRM is an easy way for many of us to make a small contribution to a cause, does it mean it's competing for an already scarce fundraising dollar?

The experts we spoke to said 'no'. Michael Walsh, executive director of charity researcher Givewell, says he hasn't seen any evidence to suggest this is the case. "I get annoyed when I hear the 'everyone is chasing the same fundraising dollar' argument because there's no basis for it. All the studies into fundraising in the last 10 years have shown that giving in Australia is on the increase, including individual giving."

Leonie Walton of the National Breast Cancer Foundation says CRM only forms part of the organisation's overall fundraising strategy but that it's helped capture a market that wouldn't necessarily donate at all. "We've found that our pink products capture 'non-donators' as well as younger people who may not feel that they have enough money to make a traditional donation." >



A PINK EXPLOSION

When you walk into shops this month you might think some of them have been taken over by teenage girls, thanks to the mass of hot-pink products on offer. From breakfast cereals, biscuits and bottled water in the supermarket to sandwich makers, street directories and shoes in department stores, it seems there's a pink product to suit all walks of life.

The National Breast Cancer Foundation (NBCF) has run the pink products promotion in Australia for the past four years, and this year 60 pink-branded products will hit the shelves throughout October.

Leonie Walton, Manager of Corporate and Campaign Marketing for the NBCF, says the pink products promotion raised \$2 million for cancer research last year, thanks to cause-related marketing. The promotion also greatly raised the profile of the NBCF, something it wouldn't have the budget to do solo. "Many people now say when they see anything pink they immediately think of breast cancer," she said.

Although the foundation is quickly becoming famous for "pinking up" every October, Walton says the pink products promotion forms only part of the NBCF's overall fundraising strategy. "We don't want to put all our eggs in one basket, so we have a range of fundraising activities, including the Mothers' Day Classic run and volunteer days. Most of our partners are involved with us all year round."



**NATIONAL
BREAST CANCER FOUNDATION**
FUNDING RESEARCH FOR PREVENTION AND CURE
FUNDRAISING SUPPORTER

A TALE OF TWO BOTTLES



When Mount Franklin water partnered with the National Breast Cancer Foundation two years ago to sell bottled water branded with pink lids, it was a sales success and the distinctive bottles flew off the shelves. The partnership has so far contributed \$500,000 to the cause.

Early this year, Mount Franklin partnered with Landcare in a similar promotion, resulting in a \$150,000 investment

to plant 250,000 trees. The initial response to this partnership couldn't have been more different from the response to the NBCF one, with critics of the bottled water brand (owned by Coca-Cola Amatil) such as the Bottled Water Alliance blasting the two organisations with accusations of greenwash.

Coca Cola spokesperson Sally Loane says the criticism was unfair and that the project wasn't greenwash. "We did

what we said and donated 250,000 trees to Landcare. We weren't pretending to be carbon neutral, we weren't pretending to be green or pretending to do carbon offsets from our bottle emissions."

Landcare National Business Development Director Scott Gibson says extensive research into the partnership was done before embarking on the project. He says he knew the partnership could be a sensitive one but still believes it was a success: "\$150,000 is a huge contribution — no one jumped up and down when Mount Franklin was raising money for breast cancer. If we don't take a risk every now and then we're not going to make progress. Our objective is to work with companies to drive change."

In response to suggestions that the partnership encouraged people to buy bottled water, Loane says, "Clearly we are a company that sells bottled water, but we can enable our consumers if they want to buy bottled water to have money donated to breast cancer research or have trees planted, so there is an inbuilt extra."

"I find the criticism unfair as we've done the same thing with breast cancer, yet no one accused us of pinkwash."

While both organisations say the Landcare-Mount Franklin partnership will continue in some form, neither would confirm that a similar promotion is on the cards. In the meantime, Mount Franklin has signed up for another year of pink lids in partnership with the NBCF this month.

A good partnership can improve a charity's recognition among consumers, while the company benefits from being seen to be doing good.

< How does your money reach the cause?

Most CRM partnerships have an agreement in place to support the charity, independent of how much money is raised through product sales. Savvy charities will set a minimum guaranteed amount before the promotion commences and once the sales go above that amount, any additional funds are contributed directly from the company. Not unlike a sponsorship, the financial commitment is usually in place before the specially branded products hit the shelves.

Hailey Cavill says she insists that companies she works with agree to a minimum contribution before embarking on a CRM exercise. "I'm not comfortable with charities handing their brand over without a guaranteed return. If a company thinks it can raise a million dollars, then it needs to commit to that million. I won't facilitate a CRM agreement for anything under \$100,000 a year — anything under suggests to me that the company isn't serious."

For The Smith Family, its CRM programs contribute directly to a project within the organisation. Paul Henderson says of the Colgate promotion, "It was very specific, it wasn't just putting money into a general fund. It was about funding a specific program around oral hygiene."

What are the advantages of CRM?

Michael Walsh of Givewell says that a good CRM partnership can improve a charity's recognition among consumers. "To achieve name recognition is very expensive, and any cause-related marketing a charity can do that improves unprompted name recognition is obviously going to do better than other fundraising appeals," he says.

Hailey Cavill says another advantage is that many causes need to raise awareness and educate the public. "A good example is breast cancer charities, such as the NBCF [National Breast Cancer Foundation]. I think they've been very smart recognising that with this disease women need to know how to take preventative measures. To reach those women you can either spend millions of dollars advertising in women's magazines or you can align with companies that already have products that women are buying. It's a perfect way to get your message out there and raise money at the same time."

For companies, there's increasing awareness that to be seen to be doing good is good for business. While many companies already donate funds to charities through foundations or workplace giving, CRM is a public way of communicating corporate social responsibility as well as having the opportunity to increase sales.

When doesn't CRM work?

Most of the experts we spoke to agree that there are two key issues to a good cause-related partnership — that it is long-standing and both the company and the charity have similar goals. If the company and the cause don't have a good fit it's usually the charity that comes off second best.

Michael Walsh says the main disadvantage of CRM is that the relationship between the charity and the company could be unequal. "If you have a company with a big budget and lots of expertise and then you have a charity that has a good brand but not as much in terms of resources, you've got an unequal relationship and the risk is that the charity sells itself too cheaply."

While big national charities such as The Smith Family and the NCBF admit they are in a position to pick and choose which organisations they partner with, other charities may not be so fortunate. The experts also agree that CRM won't work for all charities. While causes that support children, breast cancer and the environment are always popular, lesser-known or what could be perceived as unappealing causes aren't likely to be appearing on your supermarket shelves anytime soon.

Sue Anne Wallace, CEO of Fundraising Institute Australia, says that charities need to think carefully about choosing a partner. "If a charity loses its reputation either by something it does or by what its partner does, that reputation is harmed and could be irrevocably harmed. Reputation is the most precious thing a charity has."

Hailey Cavill says she sees a lot of companies choosing the wrong charity. "Many are jumping on the green bandwagon right now just because it's hot. I've had companies come to me wanting to do something environmental but when I've asked questions about their own practices they realise an environmental CRM would leave them open to public scrutiny. In the environmental space, walking the talk is critical."

Good cause or are we being 'causewashed'?

While the experts we spoke to agreed that many CRM promotions can help support a cause in a small way, they also agreed that not all partnerships are as good as they should be. So how do consumers know which partnerships are worthwhile?

Check the label Legitimate product-cause partnerships should be transparent about how much is being given to the charity either as a per product amount, percentage or total amount. On some high-volume products the amount contributed per item is very small, so these brands often talk about the total rather than the contribution per product.



WHAT CHOICE READERS SAY

We surveyed CHOICE readers at choice.com.au to find out how they feel about CRM products. This is what some of them said:

- "I tend to stick with the brands I know, but I'll support a product that's associated with a charity I've had personal experience with. If I'm going to buy the product anyway I may as well choose the one that supports that charity."
- "I feel more comfortable buying a product that meets my needs and separately supporting the charities I understand enough to give my support to."
- "I'm not swayed, because price and the quality of the brand are more important. However, if I have a choice between two identical products, I'll choose the product that supports the charity. It makes less sense to buy a product that supports a charity that has no inherent link to the product itself. I'm generally cynical of such marketing ploys."
- "If it's a product I normally purchase and a portion is going to a charity, it's a bonus. However, I'm more likely to donate to a charity directly. I'm quite wary of how my charity dollars are spent and how much actually gets to the cause."
- "If I'm buying a product and one of the brands supports a charity, I'd definitely consider it and be likely to buy that product over the others."
- "When I see those products supporting a good cause I do think 'wow, that's a good idea/cause' but I don't actually pick up the item and buy it. It doesn't prompt me to buy a product I wouldn't ordinarily buy."

Check that the price of the product isn't more than products of similar quality. There's no point buying a bottle of water that costs \$2 and contributes just 10 cents to a charity when another bottle of water costs \$1. In that case, you'd be better off donating that dollar you saved.

Stop and think Don't let your concern for a cause encourage you to buy a product you don't really want or need, or buy a product that could be detrimental to the cause it claims to support. Does buying bottled water that supports the environment fit with your environmental philosophy?

Ask the charity Unless bound by confidentiality, most charities will be transparent about the contribution they receive from a partnership, so if in doubt check with the charity to make sure that the product is genuinely assisting it. ■

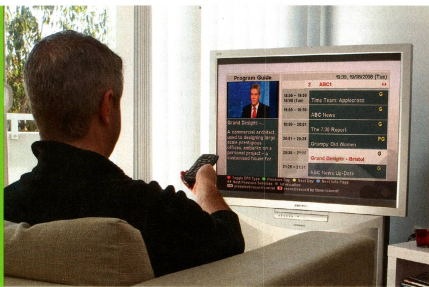
CHOICE verdict

While cause-related marketing promotions offer consumers the opportunity to make a small contribution to a good cause without having to leave the shopping aisle, this kind of marketing exercise can't replace actual giving.

These promotions can be effective for charities, but it's important to remember that cause-related marketing is still a business transaction. If you're happy with the quality and price of the product, as well as the cause it supports, it's a way to make a small contribution. However, if there's a cause or charity you feel strongly about, the best way to show your support is to donate directly to the charity.

Get ready to organise your TV viewing

What's an EPG and do you need one anyway?



nutshell

► An EPG makes it much easier to record not only one program but a whole series through a PVR.

► Freely available and accurate EPGs will make television a better product.

An electronic program guide (EPG) is just a TV guide by another name. It's different because it isn't on paper and it comes direct to your digital TV, set-top box or PVR, rather than you having to go out and buy it. More than that, it's a useful tool for planning and organising your TV watching. Used with a personal video recorder (PVR), it can free you from the broadcaster's schedule and allow you to watch what you want when you want.

There are two types of EPG. If you've already switched over to digital TV, you're probably aware of the guides available for each channel when you press the 'Guide' or EPG button on your remote control. These EPGs are supplied free, but aren't always complete. Currently, all networks except SBS provide seven days' information. SBS limits its information to what's on now and coming next, but this could change in the future.

The other type of EPG is tied to a product you have to pay for, such as Foxtel, IceTV or TiVo. The main advantages of these EPGs are that they provide more detailed program descriptions, may be more accurate (see *Is there a problem?*, far right) and have other services such as programming a recording based on a keyword, or setting up a recording via the internet.

Why are they better than paper?

Paper guides have served us well for a long time, but in an increasingly digital world they have two major failings:

- Paper guides don't make it any easier to program your digital (hard disc) recorder, or PVR whereas an EPG does. It's as simple as putting the cursor over a program and pressing the record button — there's no need to access timer settings or fiddle with complicated menus. See *What can an EPG do?*, far right, for more information.

- As the number of channels increases and consequently the amount of programs available grows, paper listings start to get very cluttered. Space on the page is limited and program synopses get squeezed, which can reduce their usefulness.

How is an EPG made?

Each television network puts together a schedule of programs for its own use. It also creates its own EPG, which is broadcast via its digital channel.

A separate company called HWW, owned by ninemsn, aggregates the data from all the channels and sells the information on to companies that want to publish a complete TV guide and charge you for it. The networks retain their rights over the data they compile, but agree to this onselling.

In addition, companies such as IceTV compile their own information on TV programming based on what's broadcast and advertised to be broadcast. This isn't always accurate, and they have to be very careful not to infringe copyright (see *Is there a problem?*). Again, IceTV will charge you for its guide, but says the additional information and features provided make it worthwhile.

Accuracy is always a problem because networks make changes to schedules at the last moment. EPGs can't predict this, so many PVRs have the means to make allowance for some of the changes by adding some padding to the times you set for recordings.

How do I get an EPG?

For free-to-air EPGs, all you need is a newish PVR with a digital tuner. Some older PVRs have trouble with EPGs, but newer ones should display the data and allow you to select what you want to record.

If you have a set-top box without a recording function, you might be able to see the EPG, but that's all. The recording function is built into the PVR's operating system. Also, the networks supply the data for the EPG, but they don't determine how it looks on your screen. The design for displaying the information is determined by the PVR or set-top box manufacturer and it's likely that some will do a better job than others. If you're considering buying a PVR, ask the store to let you see the EPG before you take it home.

For the more technically minded, a media centre PC includes a PVR function and will also display EPGs, but may be restricted in some of its more sophisticated functions by the limited information provided by the free-to-air EPGs currently available.

There are currently only three options if you want to buy an EPG. With the first two, TiVo and Foxtel IQ, the EPG comes with the PVR. The former can be purchased outright for about \$700 from Harvey Norman and Domayne stores and the latter is available from Foxtel for \$10-\$15 a month, depending on your yearly subscription package.

The third option is IceTV's EPG which you purchase directly from IceTV for about \$8 per month on a yearly subscription. However, only some PVRs and media centre PCs are compatible.

What can an EPG do?

At the simplest level a free-to-air EPG delivers information about the time and date of a program, its name, classification rating and whether it's a repeat or new. Usually there's a brief synopsis of the plot and a list of the major actors or presenters.

This information is sent to your PVR along with program data as part of the digital data stream that makes up the digital channel. When you press the 'Guide' or 'EPG' button on your remote, the PVR updates and displays the information on your screen for the channel you're currently watching. Most PVRs leave a window that displays the program currently playing so you don't miss anything.

More sophisticated PVRs can display more than one channel's data at a time, but we have yet to see one other than TiVo that will update the data in the EPG without changing channels. EPGs that you subscribe to, such as Foxtel's IQ or IceTV, enable features like this as well as adding other functions and information.

Whether the EPG is free or paid for, setting up a recording is usually a matter of pressing the record button with the program you want highlighted. The better PVRs prompt you to set it to record just once, weekly or at a given interval. At the very sophisticated level, products such as TiVo will record every instance of a selected program regardless of when it's broadcast, or every program with a particular actor or director, or of a certain genre. ■

IS THERE A PROBLEM?

There's money in schedules. Channel Nine took IceTV to court and won an injunction to stop them selling an EPG that Nine claimed infringed its copyright, even though IceTV wrote all the program descriptions itself. According to the court, IceTV checking the accuracy of its timings against already published information led to an infringement of Nine's copyright. IceTV hasn't given up yet, but it's clear the networks see EPGs as a potential revenue stream.

In print, advertising is the major form of funding and you can bet there'll be advertising close on the heels of any electronic form of TV guide. Channel 7 let slip in its launch of the TiVo PVR that there'll be the potential for banner advertising alongside program listings.

An independent group called MyEPG recently started lobbying the government to make sure an EPG is available to everyone. It argues that the current offering is incomplete or inaccurate and that Australia should follow other countries' example in making the provision of an EPG part of the licensing provisions for free-to-air broadcasters.

CHOICE agrees that consumers should be provided with accurate information to enable them to determine what they watch and when. It's also in the interests of the government, which is keen to see digital TV gain wide acceptance. A freely available and accurate EPG will increase competition in the market for fully functional PVRs and associated services that have the potential to improve consumers' TV watching experience.

CHOICE argues that freely available and accurate EPGs will increase competition and improve consumers' TV viewing experience.

Did you know?

What's TiVo? TiVo is a digital recorder (PVR) that's available in Australia via an agreement with Channel 7. This doesn't limit it to any particular channel's broadcasts, but Channel 7 obviously sees it as a future profitable product. It requires a broadband internet connection as well as a normal TV aerial to work, but unlike TiVo in the US there's no ongoing subscription cost. However, at the launch of TiVo there was a clear indication that extra functions and services may well come at a cost.

TiVo will learn your preferences and record any program that fits your normal viewing habits. The EPG for TiVo is sent to it via your internet connection and has more detail than the broadcast EPG.

CHOICE hopes to see competitors for TiVo in the near future. IceTV is keen to be a player in supplying its product to PVR and media centre PC manufacturers that want to compete, and there may be others in future if the copyright issues can be resolved.

CHOICE is currently reviewing the TiVo product and we'll have more information on it soon.



Shade by shade



Moisturising tanning lotions promise a hint of colour for pale legs before summer arrives, but do they live up to their claims? We sent them to CHOICE's Home Testers to find out.

nutshell

► Out trialists quite liked most of the products as a moisturiser, but a third of them found the tan too light.

► Most products need to be applied every day to maintain the tan, which makes their price a major consideration.

As the last vestiges of winter creep away it's time to pack up your winter woollies and get into summer clothes. But months of hibernating in front of the heater have left you pasty pale with skin like a lizard.

It's a given you'll want to moisturise your dry skin, but what about the lack of colour? While the dangers of sunbaking are well known, the appeal of a tan is still strong for many people. A fake tan is the safest option, but professional tans are expensive and time-consuming, while self-tanners can be messy, difficult to apply and smelly.

What if there was a product that promised to moisturise as well as give you a subtle colour, all from one bottle? Sounds perfect, but does it do the job?

CHOICE's Home Testers tried out 17 brands of moisturising tanning lotion to see which ones rated best for moisturising the skin as well as giving a bronzed look.

How much effort for a little colour?

The instructions for most of the moisturisers in the trial say they must be used daily for best results, which isn't difficult for most people. Some products also suggest exfoliating before the first application, while the ELLA BACHÉ product suggests that exfoliating before every use will give the best results. That's quite a lot of effort for a little bit of colour.

Most trialists thought the lotions produced a tan that looked 'very natural' or 'somewhat natural' in appearance. Almost half the trialists found the colour of their tans 'about right', while just over a third found it 'too light'.

Trialists thought the moisturising tanning lotions were 'very easy' to apply, and most found that they didn't stain their clothes after application.

What to buy

BIOETHERM Summer Source Medium Skin Tone

PRICE \$50 per 200 mL

GOOD POINTS

- Higher than average performance as a moisturiser.
- One of the top scores for tan colour satisfaction.

BAD POINTS

- It's expensive.

Trialist comments

"Very smooth and it spread evenly over the skin."
 "Citrus scent was fresh without any chemical undertones."
 "Great moisturiser for those wanting quick results. A little on the orangey side when used daily."



OLAY Complete Touch of Sun Light Sun-kissed Glow

PRICE \$9.29 per 200 mL

GOOD POINTS

- One of the top scores for tan colour satisfaction.
- Smooth creamy texture.
- Good value.

BAD POINTS

- Nothing in particular.

Trialist comments

"Absorbed quickly."
 "Reasonably even and takes away that sickly white naked look."
 "If you wanted a dark tan, this wouldn't be for you. I liked it because it was very natural."



The number of days it took to produce a tan of optimal colour usually varied from three to six, depending on which product our trialists were using. However, just fewer than a quarter of trialists reported that the tan never reached an optimal colour in the seven days they had to try them.

Price isn't everything

For the products on test, price was not an indicator of performance. The top-rating product, BIODERM Summer Source, clocked in at \$50 for 200 mL, while the second- and third-best performers, OLAY and NIVEA, were a relative bargain at \$9.29 and \$4.88 per 200 mL respectively.

Other products on trial cost up to \$60 per 200 mL and several of these more expensive options didn't rate well with our trialists — see the table, below, for details. Considering that these products suggest daily use in order to optimise the tan colour, price is a major consideration. ■

HOW WE TESTED

The trialists Thank you to the 255 CHOICE Home Testers who dutifully applied moisturising tanning lotions to their legs over a seven-day period.

The lotions Each trialist received two pots of moisturising tanning lotion in unlabelled containers, so they didn't know which brands they were using. They received seven days' worth of product and were asked to use both of the lotions at the same time — one on their lower left leg and one on their lower right leg.

The trial Trialists were asked to continue with their regular washing and hair removal techniques on their lower legs for the duration of the trial, but to refrain from suntanning their legs as this could affect their ability to judge the effectiveness of the trial products. They were also asked not to use any other moisturisers, sunscreens or self-tanning products for the same reason.

Satisfaction with colour of tan Trialists were asked to rate how effective each product was at producing a natural, even-looking tan, and whether it looked natural, streaky or too light or dark.

Performance as a moisturiser Trialists were asked to rate each product's moisturising abilities after seven days' use, taking into account how well it was absorbed into the skin, how well it appeared to moisturise the skin, and its fragrance and texture.

PRODUCT	SCORES			COST
	Combined performance and satisfaction score (%)	Satisfaction with colour of tan score (%)	Performance as a moisturiser score (%)	
Brand (in rank order; number of trialists in brackets)				
Biotherm Summer Source Medium Skin Tone (33)	72	66	80	50.00
Olay Complete Touch of Sun Light Sun-kissed Glow (26)	71	68	76	9.29
Nivea Body Sunkissed Skin Fair to Medium Skin (28)	68	69	67	4.88
L'Oréal Paris Body-Expertise Nutrisummer Fair Skin (28)	67	61	77	14.76
Natio Aromatherapy Sun-kissed Glow (27)	66	63	70	11.95
Estée Lauder Body Performance Golden Naturally Radiant (28)	65	61	72	55.00
Palmer's Cocoa Butter Formula Natural Bronze (30)	65	62	69	6.08
David Jones Gradual Tan Lotion (31)	64	60	70	11.96
Dove Summer Glow Fair to Normal Skin (30)	63	61	67	5.40
Face of Australia Sun Kissed SPF 15 (33)	63	61	65	8.26
Garnier Skin Naturals Bodysummer (36)	63	61	66	7.67
Lancôme Paris Sensuelle Summer (32)	63	61	67	60.00
Le Tan Daily Glow SPF 15 Fair to Normal Skin (36)	62	56	72	6.39
Health Basics Summer Radiance (28)	60	56	66	2.85
Johnson's Holiday Skin Normal to Fair Skin (25)	58	51	69	5.59
Guardian Gradual Tanning Moisturiser (25)	57	49	70	4.76
Ella Baché Great Sunkiss (26)	53	45	66	42.00

USING THE TABLE

Scores The combined performance and satisfaction score is made up of:

- Satisfaction with the colour of the tan: 60%
- Performance as a moisturiser: 40%

Price This was calculated from the average price we paid in April 2008.

Some of the more expensive lotions — up to \$60 per 200 mL — didn't rate well with our trialists so price needs to be considered.

Paying extra for extras

Don't get taken for a ride with expensive or unnecessary new car options. Aftermarket purchases are usually a much better option.



nutshell

- Some options, such as rustproofing, are unnecessary for typical car owners.
- Accessories such as roof racks can be pricey when dealer-supplied.
- Factory-fitted safety options are definitely worth having.



Not worth it

Extended warranties can sound great in the showroom, but the devil is in the detail. Dealer extended warranties often require you to have the car serviced exclusively by the dealer who sells you the car, and missing a scheduled service can void the warranty. They can also be very restrictive in what they cover. Extended factory warranties are usually less restrictive than those from dealers, but you still need to read the terms and conditions carefully before signing. In most cases the standard three- or five-year warranty is good enough.

Rustproofing and paint protection raise the question: isn't the car already rustproofed? The answer is yes. New cars are treated at the factory and any rust problems should be covered by the warranty. Unless you live next to the sea or like to drive along the beach, don't opt for extra

DEFINITELY WORTH HAVING

Safety options are always worth having, and usually have to be factory-fitted, so you need to choose which ones you want before buying.

Airbags If side and curtain airbags aren't standard in your chosen model, they may be available as options for only a few hundred dollars extra.

ABS An anti-lock braking system is usually standard on new cars, but can be optional on cheaper models.

Stability control is also known as Electronic Stability Program or Dynamic Stability Control and is an anti-skid technology that applies braking to individual wheels to stabilise the vehicle when it detects a situation such as fishtailing.

Full-size spare tyre Space saver and temporary-use spare wheels are common, even in big cars. They're only for emergency use, to get you to the nearest garage. If you regularly drive long distances, especially in country areas where the distances between garages are great, a full-size spare is a better option.

Did you know ?

You won't always have the choice of picking and choosing individual options. Some manufacturers, such as Mercedes-Benz, offer a range of packages instead, in which different sets of options are bundled together.

rustproofing. Paintwork is also covered by warranty for major problems and shouldn't need anything more than an occasional clean and polish. Dealers often charge several hundred dollars for paint and rust protection; if you really want this extra treatment, you can get it aftermarket (or even do it yourself) for much less.

Fabric protection might consist of nothing more than the dealer treating the car seats with a can of fabric protector from the supermarket. You can do that yourself for a lot less and with just as good a result.

Alarms are of questionable value. It's likely to be ignored if it goes off, and you could even be fined for noise pollution if it goes off without good cause. All new cars have engine immobilisers, usually with central locking, and that's all you need. If you want a fully featured alarm system, compare the dealer price with aftermarket options; you might get a better deal elsewhere.



Only at the right price

Some accessories can be useful and appealing additions to your car, but you'll get them cheaper — sometimes a lot cheaper — at auto stores rather than through the dealer. There are some extras, however, that must be factory-fitted, or you might just want the convenience of having the dealer supply and fit the option for you. Also, dealer and factory-fitted accessories are usually covered by the vehicle warranty. It's your call.



Floor mats help keep the carpet clean, but do you really want to pay anything from \$70 to more than \$100 for them when you can get aftermarket car mats for \$40 or less? The same applies to seat covers and boot liners.



GPS navigation Factory-fitted dash-mounted systems offer bigger screens and integrated functionality and are less easily stolen than portable models (although car

thieves sometimes target these high-end systems and cause extensive damage to the dashboard in the process). You might also be forced to get your software and map updates from the car manufacturer.

Some manufacturers and dealers also offer portable GPS systems, but they're usually cheaper elsewhere. For example, Ford offers a Garmin Nüvi 760 for \$799, while the same model is available from retailers for about \$640.

Headlight and bonnet protectors are really only useful if you often drive on unsealed roads.



Nudge and bull bars aren't necessary for typical city driving. But if you opt for one, a factory-fitted bar has the advantage of having been

tested with the vehicle's airbag system — the bar affects the vehicle's behaviour in a collision. If you go for an aftermarket nudge bar, ask the supplier if it's compatible with the airbags in your car.

Premium sound systems can make travelling much more pleasant, but have a listen to the car's standard system first. It might be all you need, especially if it already has a CD player and MP3 player connection.



Roof racks and roof luggage boxes

are almost always cheaper aftermarket. A set of roof racks plus roof luggage box would cost about \$1270 from Holden or Ford;

you could get comparable roof racks plus a luggage box from Rhino Rack or Thule for about \$700 to \$800.

Special suspension, such as sports (firmer springs and lower ride) or country suspension (with increased ride height), is useful for some drivers, but test-drive both the special version and the standard suspension so you know what you're getting before you commit yourself to this option.



Towbar Get quotes from a couple of independent towbar installers to compare with the dealer price. As with other options, the dealer price will probably be higher.

Window tinting is already standard on most cars. Do you

really need even darker windows? ■

CHOICE verdict

Dealers often 'throw in' a few options to sweeten the deal, so it's good to know the dollar value of what they're offering. Before you go shopping for a new car, check the manufacturer websites. Most list the available options with prices and let you experiment with configuring a car in different ways. Look at brochures from auto stores so you can compare prices for accessories. Armed with this information, you can negotiate a better deal when you hit the showroom.

Before you go shopping for a new vehicle, check the carmakers' websites so you can compare accessory prices.



Pumped up

There's no champagne in 'champagne ham'— but you can pay champagne prices for the water that's been added to the meat.

nutshell

► All 46 varieties of packaged ham we tested contained extra water, added during the curing process. In a third of them the extra water amounted to 20% or more of the product.

► Packaged ham often contains a cocktail of chemicals, some of them specifically added to retain extra water.

► 'Real' sliced ham off the bone bought loose from the supermarket's deli counter can be cheaper than packaged ham.

No one expects pre-packaged and pre-sliced ham to be a gourmet's delight, but it's convenient for making sandwiches or a pizza topping. You might be surprised, though, at just how much added water these products can contain instead of the meat you think you're paying for. CHOICE tested 46 brands and varieties of packaged ham from the big supermarket chains. A third of them contained 20% or more added water — obviously a much cheaper ingredient than real meat.

Hamming it up

Traditionally, ham was made by salting pork to preserve the meat for winter. Some ham is still 'dry cured' in much the same way. The meat is rubbed with a mixture of salt and other ingredients, usually including sodium nitrite (see *Chemical cocktail*, opposite). It's then hung to dry and mature for several months. During this time enzymes in the meat break down some of the muscle protein, producing the flavours and texture of traditional hams, such as English York ham or Italian prosciutto.

Nowadays, most packaged ham is 'wet cured' in an industrial process that takes only a few days. The meat is injected with a solution of salt, sugar and other chemicals, then massaged in special machines to spread the chemicals evenly through the meat. It's then cooked, chilled, sliced and packaged. Cheaper hams aren't cut from whole joints of meat but are made from small pieces of meat pressed together before cooking. This gives the ham a more even colour and fat distribution.

Did you know ?

Cool it! Packaged ham contains salt and sodium nitrite as preservatives, but unlike traditional dry-cured ham it also contains plenty of water. This creates a moist environment in which dangerous bacteria can multiply unless the ham is kept below 4°C. So store it in the fridge and don't keep it for more than a few days. If it's slimy toss it out, because bacteria is multiplying on its surface.

Making a big profit on water

All the products in our test were wet-cured and contained at least some extra water (see the table, page 36, for details). The hams with most meat (more than 90%) and least added water (6% or less) were:

- PRIMO Leg Ham Double Smoked.
- DANDY Shaved Premium Leg Ham.
- PRIMO Leg Ham Honey Cured.
- PRIMO Premium Leg Ham Shaved.
- COURTWAY Continental Double Smoked Leg Ham (Aldi).
- COURTWAY Continental Leg Ham (Aldi).

And the wettest of the wet, WOOLWORTHS Deli Leg Ham (a pre-packaged 'grab and go' product from the deli fridge), was the standout that contained the least meat (53%) and the most added water (38%).

You might think the cheaper hams contain the most added water, but on average this isn't the case. It seems some manufacturers make extra profit by selling water for the price of meat. When we worked out what you're paying for the water we were stunned to find 11 products where it cost about \$26 per 750 mL (the size of a bottle of wine). You'd pay more for French champagne but there are some very good Australian bubbles for that price.

Cheaper ham at the deli counter

We only tested packaged ham but we found plenty of varieties of sliced ham sold loose at the deli counter were much cheaper than their pre-packaged equivalents. And at the deli counter you can choose ham that's been cut from the bone — so at least you know it's not manufactured from small pieces of processed meat that have been stuck together. Even ham cut from the bone is cheaper (at about \$2.30 per 100 g) than many of the packaged hams we tested.

Four of the packaged hams, WOOLWORTHS Honey Leg Ham, WOOLWORTHS Double Smoked Leg Ham, WOOLWORTHS Premium Lite Leg Ham and WOOLWORTHS Deli Leg Ham, were packed in the store from ham also sold loose at the deli counter.

Chemical cocktail of ham

Most packaged hams have plenty of additives listed on the label and some of these are there specifically to make the meat hold extra water:

Phosphates

Phosphates (450, 451, 452) All the hams in our test contain phosphates. They're added to increase the water-binding capacity of the muscle fibres. Phosphates also make the ham juicier and more tender, and when

it's made from small pieces of pork they help to glue them together. There's no real risk to your health from phosphates. Excessive consumption may contribute to osteoporosis but only a small fraction of the phosphates in our diet comes from additives.

Maltodextrin

Maltodextrin This is a thickening agent made from starch. It helps to retain extra water in the meat and was added to nearly half the hams we tested. It's used in many processed foods (it counts as 'dietary fibre') and appears to be safe. Other thickening agents we found in a few hams were guar gum (412; of plant origin), xanthan gum (415; made by bacteria) and carrageenan (407; from seaweed). These additives are used in many processed foods and are thought to be safe in the small amounts used.

Sodium nitrite

Sodium nitrite (250) All the packaged hams in our test contain this chemical. It's added as a preservative — it helps to prevent the growth of the bacteria that cause botulism — and it's also what makes ham

pink and improves the flavour. But nitrites can cause the formation of potent cancer-causing chemicals called nitrosamines. Studies consistently find that consumption of meat, particularly processed meat, is associated with a modest increase in the risk of colorectal cancer (and probably stomach cancer as well). A recent report from the World Cancer Research Fund recommended that we avoid processed meat for this reason. However, meat processors argue that the risk of developing cancer is much less than the risk to your health from harmful bacteria if the nitrite wasn't added. Organic ham is made without sodium nitrite, so it's clearly not essential and you can avoid it if you're prepared to pay extra for organic ham.

Sodium erythorbate

Sodium erythorbate (316) Almost all the packaged hams contain this additive. It's added as a curing accelerator and as an antioxidant (it helps to prevent loss of colour and flavour), and it helps stop

the formation of nitrosamines. It's believed to be harmless (it's first cousin to vitamin C, but lacks any vitamin activity).

Least added water — most meat



What's in a name?

'Champagne', 'English', 'Danish', 'Virginian', 'Monaco'... Do these names on the label mean anything? Very little.

They represent different styles of ham but there are no standard definitions and the names often mean whatever the manufacturer wants them to mean. Certainly there's no champagne in 'champagne ham', and 'English ham' hasn't been imported from England. The manufacturer of HANS Monaco ham told us that name signifies a premium product, and that 'Virginian' generally means the ham has been pressed into a flat shape. (In the US, though, a 'Virginia ham' must have been produced in the state of Virginia.)

On another level, you might think ham is always meat from one of the rear quarters of a pig — the *Macquarie Dictionary* does, and so does the international food standard, the *Codex Alimentarius*. But the meat in packaged ham can come from all sorts of parts of a pig's anatomy.

Does 'bred free-range' mean anything?

Another claim on the label that means less than you might think is 'bred free range'. It doesn't mean that the meat came from free-range pigs (as opposed to pigs reared intensively, penned in sheds or in eco-shelters). 'Bred free range' piglets are born outdoors, to mothers that live in the open, but once weaned (at about three weeks) they're moved into sheds or shelters and reared in the same way as intensively farmed pigs. But at least the mothers are spared confinement in farrowing crates, which many people believe to be the most inhumane aspect of intensive pig farming.

When the label says 'honey cured' or 'honey ham', though, there really must be some honey in the curing solution (although not necessarily very much). And 'smoked' ham really has been smoked (it's done at the cooking stage) — even if the effect is artificially boosted with 'smoke flavour'. >

Most packaged hams have plenty of additives and some of these are there specifically to make the meat hold extra water.

Supermarket packaged ham

PRODUCT	PER 100 G			
	Added water (%)	Cost of water (cents)	Pork (%)	Price (\$)
Brand (ranked by added water per 100 g)				
Primo Leg Ham Double Smoked	4	12	95	3.29
Dandy Shaved Premium Leg Ham	5	14	95	2.88
Primo Leg Ham Honey Cured	5	17	93	3.29
Primo Premium Leg Ham Shaved	5	17	95	3.38
Courtway Continental Double Smoked Leg Ham (Aldi)	6	7	95	1.33
Courtway Continental Leg Ham (Aldi)	6	7	95	1.33
Hans Monaco Medium Sliced	8	27	86	3.43
Hans Country Fresh Premium Bush Honey Leg Ham	10	35	86	3.60
Courtway Shaved Ham (Aldi)	11	19	85	1.75
Courtway Sliced Leg Ham (Aldi)	11	22	85	1.99
Courtway Shaved Honey Roast Ham (Aldi)	12	20	85	1.75
Hans Country Fresh Premium Smokehouse Leg Ham	12	41	85	3.60
Hans Country Fresh Premium Oven Baked Leg Ham	13	45	86	3.60
KR Castlemaine Double Smoked Virginian Leg Ham Shaved	13	46	80	3.42
KR Castlemaine Honey Roast Leg Ham Shaved	13	44	80	3.42
KR Castlemaine Fine Sliced Leg Ham	14	29	80	2.11
You'll Love Coles Baked Honey Leg Ham	15	40	80	2.78
KR Castlemaine Shredded Ham	16	20	75	1.32
Woolworths Select Double Smoked Leg Ham	16	47	80	2.88
Woolworths Select Honey Roast Leg Ham	16	47	80	2.88
Weight Watchers Shaved Leg Ham	17	47	77	2.68
Woolworths Select Champagne Leg Ham	17	50	80	2.88
You'll Love Coles Smoked Ham	17	39	78	2.20

PRODUCT, CONTINUED	PER 100 G			
	Added water (%)	Cost of water (cents)	Pork (%)	Price (\$)
Brand (ranked by added water per 100 g)				
Hans Honey Roasted Leg Ham Fine Sliced	18	40	74	2.24
KR Castlemaine Champagne Leg Ham Shaved	18	45	74	2.50
KR Castlemaine Danish Leg Ham Shaved	18	46	74	2.50
Woolworths Honey Leg Ham	18	41	74	2.30
Dandy Shaved Honey Leg Ham	19	58	74	2.88
KR Castlemaine Bred Free Range Shaved Leg Ham	19	65	77	3.42
Primo Champagne Leg Ham Thinly Sliced	19	68	77	3.45
Primo Honey Leg Ham Shaved	19	68	74	3.38
Don Honey Roasted Leg Ham Shaved	20	41	71	2.07
Don Lite Leg Ham	20	56	71	2.75
Woolworths Double Smoked Leg Ham	20	40	74	2.09
Hans Leg Ham Fine Sliced	21	53	74	2.59
Don Double Smoked Leg Ham Shaved	22	61	71	2.75
Don English Leg Ham Shaved	22	50	71	2.20
Hans Baked Virginian Leg Ham	22	27	74	1.17
Hans Champagne Leg Ham	22	54	74	2.56
Hans Leg Ham Double Smoked	22	55	74	2.56
Hans Leg Ham Sliced	22	56	74	2.42
Hans Traditional Smoked Leg Ham Fine Sliced	22	50	74	2.24
Primo Low Salt Leg Ham Shaved	23	79	74	3.45
Hans Leg Ham Sticks	25	74	71	2.99
Woolworths Premium Lite Leg Ham	27	61	67	2.30
Woolworths Deli Leg Ham	38	57	53	1.60



CAN PIGS FLY? YES, 70% OF THEM DO

Pigs, it seems, really can fly (or at least travel by ship). If you look at the fine print on the label you'll see that most brands of packaged ham are "Made in Australia from local and imported ingredients". This means the ham has been processed in Australia but is likely to contain at least some imported pork. According to Australian Pork Ltd, at least 70% of our pork for making ham (and bacon) now comes from the other side of the world, mostly from Canada and the US. And we know that transporting food over long distances contributes to global warming.

CHOICE would like to see all produce clearly identified with the country of origin — then consumers could make an informed choice.

USING THE TABLE

Added water Our lab measured the overall water content of the ham. We then deducted the water that's a normal component of pork, based on the percentage of meat stated on the label. The difference is the amount of water added during the curing process.

Cost of water This is how much of the price per 100 g you're paying for the added water.

Pork This is the percentage of pork stated by the manufacturer on the label.

Price Based on prices we paid in Sydney supermarkets in May 2008.

On test

Home entertainment,
whitegoods, household
and personal appliances
— they're all tested here.



Inside

42 Canopy rangehoods



45 Multifunction electric ovens



50 Air conditioners



Plus

54 Pool cleaners

57 Car roof boxes

60 Playpens

For more product tests go to **choice.com.au**

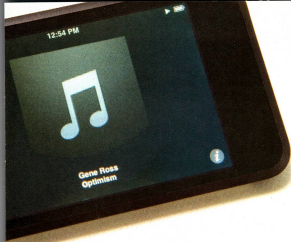
CHOICE has its own testing laboratories, where experienced technical staff put products through their paces. We use test methods from Australian standards, as well as developing our own in order to match the way consumers use a product in reality. We buy the products we test, to maintain our independence from manufacturers and so that we know what you're faced with in the shops. Our recommendations are based on a product's quality and performance, with no hidden bias.



CHOICE Best Buy CHOICE calls a product a Best Buy if it delivers high quality at a comparatively low price. Not every test report has Best Buys.

CHOICE Green Buy CHOICE calls a product a Green Buy if it delivers both good quality and environmental performance at a comparatively low price. Not every test report has Green Buys.

CHOICE Video When you see the CHOICE Video icon, you can find more information about that story at choice.com.au.



Sound in your pocket

Carrying music about is getting easier all the time, but some players make it simpler than others.

nutshell

▶ iPods are good, but they're not the only option.
▶ Battery life varies greatly and isn't related to the size of the player.
▶ Touchscreens may be sexy, but they aren't always easy to use.

There's no shortage of choice when it comes to portable music. Apple has the bulk of the market with its very successful iPod range, but many other MP3 players do a good job. CHOICE tested 12 new players and carried over six from our previous test that are still available.

There's only one hard-drive player in this line-up, but it's a good performer if you're looking for lots of storage capacity. The others are all flash memory devices and many come in a variety of capacities. Larger or smaller capacities than the one we tested shouldn't have any effect on the players' function, beyond the number of songs or images they can store.

Software

We used either iTunes or Windows Media Player (WMP) if there was no software supplied. iTunes is free to download, but at about 57 MB on Windows XP it's large, so there's a cost if you're on a limited internet plan. WMP is installed with Windows operating systems, but the latest update is 24.5 MB, so it's not small either.

Both are easy to use for simple tasks such as ripping CDs, transferring to a player and organising music on your computer, but they also contain some digital rights management functions, which could restrict their usefulness.

Most of the software supplied with the players is reasonably easy to use, but:

- The LENOXX software refused to install and when we requested a replacement CD, it came with only some of the original software. LENOXX informed us it no longer supplies this software with the player.
- The COWON software is confusing and doesn't support long file names. It just gives an error message and you have to rename the file.
- The software supplied with the SAMSUNG YP-K3JA and YP-U3JQ has a similar problem with long file names, but it truncates them, which can cause problems with song files that have similar names.
- Our tester found the iriver software difficult to use, but it worked OK once he figured it out. >

HOW WE TESTED

Ease of use Our testers checked how easy the players are to set up and play music on, and how easy it is to rip and transfer music files using the software provided or, if none was supplied, using Windows Media Player (or iTunes for the Apple products).

Portability They also evaluated how easy each player is to handle, carry around or wear.

Sound They listened to a variety of music on each player with the earbuds provided.

Batteries To check how long the batteries on each model last without recharging or replacing the battery, our testers played each model at the same volume on repeat-play mode until they switched off.



What to buy

MP3 players with flash drive

84% Apple iPod Nano

PRICE \$189
CAPACITY 4 GB
GOOD POINTS

- Very easy to set up and use.
- Very easy to transfer music to the player.
- Can be used while recharging via USB.

BAD POINTS

- No inbuilt microphone (for voice recording).
- No provision for a clip or a strap.



84% Apple iPod Touch

PRICE \$399
CAPACITY 8 GB
GOOD POINTS

- Plays video.
- Adequate screen size for video.
- Relatively long battery life.
- Internet access via Wi-Fi.

BAD POINTS

- Comparatively large.
- Difficult to adjust volume precisely.
- No inbuilt microphone (for voice recording).



84% Samsung P2 YP-P2J

PRICE \$250
CAPACITY 4 GB
GOOD POINTS

- Plays video.
- Adequate screen size for video.
- Relatively long battery life.
- Bluetooth connection for up to two sets of wireless headphones.

BAD POINTS

- Main menu scrolling is difficult to master.



MP3 players with hard drive

79% Apple iPod Classic 80GB

PRICE \$319
CAPACITY 80 GB
GOOD POINTS

- Plays video.
- Adequate screen size for video.
- Relatively long battery life.
- Large storage capacity.

BAD POINTS

- Large and heavy.
- No inbuilt microphone (available as an optional accessory).



82% Sony Walkman NWZ-S616F

PRICE \$179
CAPACITY 4 GB
GOOD POINTS

- Plays video.
- Relatively long battery life.

BAD POINTS

- Small screen for video.
- No inbuilt microphone (for voice recording).



79% Cowon iAUDI07

PRICE \$294
CAPACITY 4 GB
GOOD POINTS

- Line-in socket for recording from another device.
- Very easy to set up.
- Double the battery life of the others.

BAD POINTS

- The supplied software is time-consuming and frustrating to use.
- Text and icons hard to read on the small screen.



79% Samsung YP-K3JA

PRICE \$159
CAPACITY 4 GB
GOOD POINTS

- Very easy to set up and use.

BAD POINTS

- No inbuilt microphone (for voice recording).
- No provision for a clip or a strap.



79% Sandisk Sansa e260

PRICE \$199
CAPACITY 4 GB
GOOD POINTS

- Plays video.
- Small screen for video.
- Only displays bitmap images, not JPEGs.



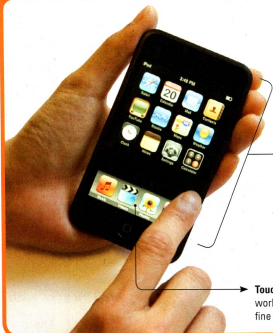
About the rest

Battery life reduced the scores for most of the others, but as music players most do the job well (see the table, page 40, for sound scores). None is difficult to use and all except the LENOXX MP 34 and NU DOLPHIN have sound scores higher than 60%. The first LENOXX we bought was faulty and the second scored lowest in our listening test.

All have small screens, which aren't good for looking at images but are OK for displaying file information. The NU DOLPHIN doesn't have a screen.

If you use a Mac or an older PC, check that the player and its software are compatible with your computer.

What to look for



MP3 PLAYER BASICS

- **Rechargeable battery** Most MP3 players have a built-in rechargeable (Li-ion or Li-polymer) battery pack that you can recharge from your computer's USB port or from an AC adapter (batteries generally charge faster using this). Only one of the players in the test uses AAA batteries (rechargeable or otherwise). The table below lists which players can be used while they're recharging.
- **Compatibility** If you use a Mac or an older PC, check that the player and its software are compatible with your computer.
- **Larger screens** These are useful if you've got lots of music to organise or want to store and view photos and video. If you want to use them to watch movies or display your photos, only the largest models are likely to be useful.
- **File types supported** If you want to use your player for things other than listening to music, check whether it supports the relevant file types. The most common file format for photos is JPEG; for video, it's MP4, and of course they'll all play an MP3 music file. The table on the right shows which file types each of the tested players supports.

Touchscreens make for a sleek design and when they work are very easy to use. However, they can make fine control difficult in some circumstances.

PRODUCT	PERFORMANCE					FEATURES					SPECIFICATIONS
Brand / model (in rank order)	Overall score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Sound score (%)	Battery score (%)	Average measured battery life (hours/minutes)	Playback while recharging (USB)	Mac-compatible	FM radio	JPG display	Supplied software	Dimensions (mm H x W x D)
FLASH DRIVE											
Apple iPod Nano	84	81	83	91	26:12	✓	✓	✓	✓	iTunes 7.6.2.9	70 x 52 x 7
# Apple iPod Touch 8GB	84	78	85	93	28:10	✓	✓	✓	✓	iTunes 7.6.2.9	110 x 62 x 8
# Samsung P2 YP-P2J	84	77	87	93	28:00			✓	✓	Samsung Media Studio 5.2.1.4	100 x 52 x 10
# Sony Walkman NWZ-S616F	82	83	77	91	25:47	✓	✓	✓	✓	Media Manager for Walkman 1.1.0.464	80 x 42 x 12
Cowon iAUDIO7	79	69	79	100	52:06		✓	✓	✓	Cowon Media Centre Jetaudio Basic VX	32 x 76 x 19
Samsung YP-K3JA	79	72	82	85	21:08		✓	✓	✓	Samsung Media Studio 5.1.5	96 x 45 x 7
# Sandisk Sansa e260	79	77	80	80	17:37			✓		Sansa Media Converter 1.2.1.74	89 x 44 x 14
# Samsung S5 YP-S5J	76	70	87	67	10:54			✓	✓	Samsung Media Studio 5.2.1.4	47 x 96 x 15
Samsung YP-U3JQ	75	83	73	62	9:13			✓		Samsung Media Studio 5.1.4.3	26 x 79 x 11
# Apacer Audio Steno AU840	73	75	80	55	7:28	✓	✓	✓	✓	AVICConverter 2.0	47 x 72 x 14
iriver T60	72	79	75	50	6:49	na	✓	✓		iriver plus 3.3.0.2, Windows Media Player 11	22 x 65 x 21
# Apacer Audio Steno AU581	71	68	80	59	8:13	✓	✓	✓	✓	SigmaTel MSCN Audio Player 1.716.4.13 (B)	27 x 86 x 21
# Funmi D-Chord 327	70	77	63	68	11:19			✓	✓	PD Media Converter 1.2.8	88 x 41 x 10
# Laser Groove Mate V10 (A)	70	75	69	62	9:11	✓	✓	✓	✓	AVICConverter 2.0, ConsumerUpdate 2.61.2	82 x 44 x 10
# Creative Zen Stone Plus 2 GB	65	69	65	59	8:19		✓	✓		Creative Media Lite 1.11.09	31 x 56 x 13
# Lennox MP 34 4 GB	62	72	45	77	15:37	✓	✓	✓	✓	AVICConverter 3.0, ConsumerUpdate 2.7.6	91 x 56 x 15
Nu Dolphin	60	77	50	48	5:33	✓	✓			None	20 x 61 x 20
HARD DRIVE											
Apple iPod Classic 80GB	79	74	77	94	29:02	✓	✓	✓	✓	iTunes 7.6.2.9	104 x 62 x 11

PRODUCT		STORED FILE TYPES SUPPORTED	
Brand / model	Audio	Image	Video
Apple iPod nano	AAC, AIFF, Apple Lossless, Audible, MP3, WAV	BMP, GIF, JPEG, PNG, PSD (Mac only), TIFF	H.264, MP4
Apple iPod Touch 8GB	AAC (16–320 kbps), Protected AAC, MP3 (16–320 kbps), MP3, VBR, Audible (formats 2, 3 and 4), Apple Lossless, AIFF and WAV	BMP, GIF, JPEG, PNG, PSD (Mac only), TIFF	M4V, MP4, MOV
Samsung P2 YP-P2J	MP3 (8–320 kbps), WMA (48–192 kbps)	JPEG	SVI
Sony Walkman NWZ-S616F	AAC, MP3, WAV, WMA	JPEG	AVC-BL, MP4
Cowon iAUDIO7	FLAC, MP3, OGG, WAV	JPEG	XviD
Sandisk Sansa e260	MP3, WMA	BMP	MOV
Samsung YP-K3JA	MP3, WMA	JPEG	na
Samsung S5 YP-S5J	AAC (8–320 kbps), MP3 (8–320 kbps), WMA (48–192 kbps)	JPEG	SVI
Samsung YP-U3JQ	MP3, WMA	No image display	No video
Apacer Audio Steno AU840	AVI, MP3, WAV, WMA	JPEG	AVI
iriver T60	ASF, MP3, OGG, WMA	No image display	No video
Apacer Audio Steno AU581	MP3, WMA, WAV	No image display	No video
Funtwist D-Chord 327	MP3 (up to 320 kbps), WMA (up to 384 kbps)	JPEG	SMV
Laser Groove Mate V10	MP3, WMA, WAV	JPEG	AVI
Creative Zen Stone Plus 2GB	MP3 (up to 320 kbps), WMA (up to 320 kbps)	No image display	No video
Lennox MP 34 4GB	MP3, WMA	JPEG	AVI
Nu Dolphin	MP3, WMA	No image display	No video
Apple iPod Classic 80GB	AAC (16–320 kbps), Protected AAC, MP3 (16–320 kbps), MP3, VBR, Audible (formats 2, 3 and 4), Apple Lossless, AIFF and WAV	BMP, GIF, JPEG, PNG, PSD (Mac only), TIFF	M4V, MP4, MOV

Screen size (mm, W x H)	Screen resolution (pixels, W x H)	Battery	Minimum system requirements	Contact	Price (\$)
41 x 31	176 x 132	1 Li-ion	Windows XP Home SP2, Mac 10.4.9	www.apple.com/au/ipodnano	189
75 x 50	480 x 320	1 Li-ion	Windows XP Home SP2, Mac 10.4.10	www.apple.com/au/ipodtouch	399
37 x 65	272 x 480	1 Li-polymer	Windows XP Home SP2	www.samsung.com/au	250
27 x 37	240 x 320	1 Li-ion	Windows XP Home SP2	www.sony.com.au	179
27 x 22	160 x 128	1 Li-ion	Windows 98 (SE)	www.cowon.com	234
29 x 36	ns	1 Li-ion	Windows XP Home SP2	www.samsung.com/au	159
28 x 36	ns	1 Li-ion	Windows XP Home SP1	www.sandisk.com.au	199
28 x 36	176 x 220	1 Li-polymer	Windows XP Home SP2	www.samsung.com/au	240
22 x 11	ns	1 Li-polymer	Windows XP Home SP2	www.samsung.com/au	79
43 x 35	220 x 176	1 Lithium	Windows 98 (SE)	www.apacer.com	79
21 x 11	ns	1 x AAA	Windows 98 (SE)	www.iriver.com	169
23 x 8	128 x 32	1 Li-polymer	Windows 98 (SE), Mac 9.2	www.apacer.com	79
25 x 35	176 x 220	1 Li-polymer	ns	www.funtwist.com	99
31 x 40	176 x 220	1 Li-ion	Windows 98, Mac 10.3	www.laserco.net	189
13 x 13	64 x 64	1 Li-ion	Windows XP Home SP2	www.creative.com/zenstoneplus	80
42 x 56	176 x 220	1 Lithium	Windows 98 (SE)	www.lennox.com.au	119
None	na	1 Li-ion	Windows 98 (SE)	www.nu-global.com	99
50 x 38	320 x 240	1 Li-ion	Windows XP Home SP2, Mac 10.4.9	www.apple.com/au/ipodclassic	319

USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score is made up of:

- Ease of use: 40%
- Sound quality: 40%
- Battery life: 20%

Battery life scores are calculated on the basis that a player that averages 36 hours or more gets 100% and one that lasts six hours gets 50%. The battery score is based on at least two tests.

Playback while recharging means that it's possible to listen to your music while the player is connected to your PC and recharging.

Mac-compatible Other than the Apple iPod, some players' functionality may be reduced compared with use on a PC.

Capacity is in gigabytes—2 GB can store about 500 songs.

Software supplied Apple iPods use iTunes, which can be downloaded free. Other players that don't come with software can use iTunes or Windows Media Player.

Price Recommended retail, as of July 2008.

TABLE NOTES

Newly tested models.

na Not applicable—not a rechargeable battery.

ns Not stated.

(A) Discontinued, but may be in some stores.
(B) Firmware updating only.



Blowing off steam

A canopy rangehood can rid your kitchen of steam and cooking smells. We tested 10 of them to help you choose the right one.

nutshell

► No matter how well a rangehood clears away smells and steam, if it's too noisy you'll think twice about using it.

► In most cases ducting to the outside gives a better performance, but we tested two models that work very well in recirculating mode (though one is as noisy as a vacuum cleaner).

Canopy rangehoods are usually more expensive than their retractable cousins, but they're an increasingly popular way of removing cooking smells and steam from your kitchen. A third alternative is an island rangehood, fixed to the ceiling over an island cooktop rather than being on a wall over a cooktop in a kitchen bench.

We tested 10 canopy rangehoods, 900 mm wide, priced from \$559 to \$1499. We looked at how well they remove steam in their two operational modes (ducted and recirculating — see right), how noisy they are to operate and how easy they are to use and clean.

One of the cheapest rangehoods in the test, the

OMEGA, was the top scorer overall in both ducted and recirculating modes, which proves that a higher price doesn't always mean a superior product. Even though the FISHER & PAYKEL had the top score for performance in ducted mode and equal top in recirculating mode, we penalised it heavily for being too noisy (our tester requested earmuffs), which is why it's not one of the models in the *What to buy* list.

Ducted or recirculating?

All the rangehoods on test can be installed in either ducted or recirculating mode and we tested their performance in both. Ducted systems, where steam and smells are vented outside, generally do a better job — as you can see from the results — but installing them involves knocking a hole in the ceiling or wall for the ducting pipe.

For people who can't install ducting, such as apartment dwellers, a recirculating system is an alternative — steam is circulated through carbon filters back into the room. It's more expensive to run, as the carbon filters need to be replaced regularly (see Table 2 for costs) but if you get the right one, it will still do a good job.

What to buy \$

DUCTED MODE

OMEGA K224/1	BEST BUY	\$599
MIELE DA 399		\$1499
CHEF CS901S		\$639

RECIRCULATING

OMEGA K224/1	BEST BUY	\$599
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TABLE 1

PERFORMANCE: DUCTED MODE

FEATURES

Brand / model (in rank order)	Overall score (%)	Performance score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Noise score (%)*	Noise (dB)*	Control location	Type of light	Number of fan speeds	Contact
Omega K224/1	79	80	83	74	41 / 61	Front panel	20 W halogen	3	www.omega.com.au
Miele DA 399	78	75	93	80	37 / 54	Front panel	50 W halogen	4	www.miele.com.au
Chef CS901S	77	80	68	75	45 / 55	Underneath	40 W incandescent	3	www.chefappliances.com.au
Westinghouse WRF900CS	73	70	78	76	44 / 55	Front panel	40 W incandescent	3	www.westinghouse.com.au
Lofra LOH9008G	70	70	88	63	58 / 66	Front panel	20 W halogen	3	www.lofraappliances.com.au
Fisher & Paykel HC90PCHPX1 80425	69	90	88	20	54 / 72	Front panel	50 W halogen	3	www.fp.com.au
Blanco BWCE9X	67	60	83	76	45 / 54	Front panel	40 W incandescent	3	www.blanco-australia.com
Electrolux EFC 935 X/A	66	60	73	77	42 / 55	Underneath	40 W incandescent	3	www.electrolux.com.au
Bosch DKE935AAU	64	60	68	71	47 / 62	Underneath	40 W incandescent	3	www.boschappliances.com
Robinhod RCT900SS	63	60	68	68	50 / 64	Underneath	40 W incandescent	3	www.robinhood.com.au

What to look for

RANGEHOOD BASICS

- Exterior** It should be easy to clean and have no nooks and crannies where dirt and grease can build up.
- Noise** Noise is very important, which is why we allocated 30% of the overall score to it. Ask in the shop if you can listen to the rangehood on all its settings. You should be able to hold a conversation while it's on.

Filters All rangehoods have a filter. Those made of aluminium mesh are relatively easy to clean. If you install a rangehood in recirculating mode, it'll also need a carbon filter that has to be replaced regularly. See Table 2 for the cost of replacement filters.

Light Two globes over the cooking area generally provide better visibility than one. Make sure the globes are easy to replace. Generally, halogen lights provide better visibility than incandescents.

Controls Look for sliding or pushbutton controls on the front panel that are easy to reach and to operate.

Even though the Fisher & Paykel rangehood worked well, we penalised it for being too noisy (our tester requested earmuffs).

Installing your rangehood

Installing a rangehood can be done without the help of an electrician, provided there's a power point close by for it to be plugged into.

To install a rangehood in recirculating mode, mark where to drill the holes in the wall for the screws/bolts/brackets. Some manufacturers supply a template, which makes this easier. Observe minimum-height distances from the cooktop, which are given in the instructions. Finally, fasten the screws while someone holds the rangehood in position.

Installing a rangehood in ducted mode involves knocking holes into the wall or ceiling for the pipe as well as fixing the rangehood to the wall. The manufacturer usually sells the ducting kit separately. If possible, use smooth, non-flexible ducting (flexible ducting causes air turbulence, reducing the efficiency of the fan) and install it via the shortest route to the outside. Don't vent it into a wall cavity, chimney or flue that carries combustible products from other sources.

In both cases, follow the instructions carefully. >

COSTS		TABLE 2	PERFORMANCE: RECIRCULATING MODE					COSTS		
100 hours (\$)	Price (\$)		Overall score (%)	Performance score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Noise score (%)	Noise (dB)*	Cost of replacement carbon filter(s) (\$)	Filter(s) to be replaced every	Running cost for 100 hours (\$)
		Brand / model (in rank order)								
40	599	Omega K224/1	77	80	83	70	47 / 64	99 (A)	4 months	1.10
90	1499	Electrolux EFC 935 X/A	65	60	73	72	49 / 58	115	6 months	1.40
40	639	Miele DA 399	65	55	93	77	38 / 58	96	6 months	1.20
40	639	Chef CS901S	64	60	68	70	50 / 60	39	6 months	1.30
30	899	Robinhood RCT900SS	64	60	68	70	50 / 60	138 (A)	Not stated	1.50
10	875	Fisher & Paykel HC90PCHPX1 80425	63	80	88	20	64 / 71	40	2-4 months	3.00
70	899	Blanco BWCE9X	60	50	83	71	48 / 61	58	4 months	1.60
70	559	Westinghouse WRF900CS	59	50	78	71	50 / 59	39	6 months	1.30
00	949	Bosch DKE935AAU	58	50	68	70	50 / 61	99	12 months	1.80
30	1080	Lofra LOH900BG	57	50	88	62	61 / 66	49	5-6 months	2.40

USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score is a combination of:

- Performance: 60%
- Noise: 30%
- Ease of use: 10%

Running cost Based on operating the rangehood for 50 hours on low and 50 hours on high setting at 15 cents per kW.

Cost of replacement filters Recommended retail, as of July 2008.

Price Recommended retail, as of July 2008.

TABLE NOTES

* Measured at the lowest and highest fan settings. (A) The price we paid in May 2008.

Installing a rangehood in ducted mode involves knocking holes in the wall or ceiling for the pipe.

Profiles

Ducted and recirculating modes

79%/77% OMEGA K224/1

BEST BUY



PRICE \$599

GOOD POINTS

- Very good performance in both ducted and recirculating modes.
- Very easy to clean the exterior.
- Excellent controls.

BAD POINTS

- Lights don't provide good visibility over the cooking area.
- A little fiddly to replace the light bulbs.

Ducted mode only

78% MIELE DA 399



PRICE \$1499

GOOD POINTS

- Good performance in ducted mode.
- Very easy to clean the exterior.
- Excellent controls.
- Lights provide excellent visibility over the cooking area.
- Quietest operation.
- Easy to change the light bulbs.

BAD POINTS

- Expensive.

About the rest

- In ducted mode, the WESTINGHOUSE and LOFRA work well and the LOFRA is also very easy to use. The FISHER & PAYKEL gives an excellent performance score in ducted mode, but is the noisiest in the test, with a 72 dB reading with the fan on the highest setting — louder than some vacuum cleaners.
- In recirculating mode, the ELECTROLUX, CHEF and ROBINHOOD SCORED 60%, while the rest (except the FISHER & PAYKEL) scored even lower.

77% CHEF CS901S



PRICE \$639

GOOD POINTS

- Very good performance in ducted mode.
- Very easy to change the light bulbs.

BAD POINTS

- Dirt trapped under the hood around the controls isn't easy to clean.
- Lights don't provide good visibility over the cooking area.

HOW WE TESTED

The tester installed the rangehoods, following the manufacturer's instructions, above a 900 mm wide ceramic hotplate with four hobs.

Performance Our tester simmered water first in two saucepans, then four, with the fan on both the lowest and highest settings, and assessed how well the rangehood removed steam. He tested all models in ducted and recirculating modes.

Noise was measured at the lowest and highest fan settings with the noise level meter 500 mm from the front edge of the hood. The readings were averaged to produce the score.

Power output was measured at every fan setting with the lights switched off.

Ease of use assessment consisted of how easily the mesh filters can be accessed and cleaned in the kitchen sink, cleaning the exterior surface, ease of using the controls and light output.

Light output was measured by placing the light meter directly on the four hobs and over the four control knobs at the front of the hotplate. The five readings were averaged, and comments made regarding the intensity of the light output.



Baker's delight

Modern ovens do a lot more than just bake a cake.

nutshell

► There's no need to go for an oven with a host of different functions. Five basic functions are enough for great baking.
► Hate cleaning the oven? Catalytic liners or a pyrolytic function mean that your oven almost cleans itself.

If you haven't been in the market for a new oven for a while, you might be surprised to discover what they can do these days. CHOICE tested 10 multifunction ovens this time around, ranging in price from \$849 to \$1899, to find out which ones measured up.

Clean machines

While it sounds almost too good to be true, all the models in this test, except one, offer some kind of self-cleaning function. However, although 'self-cleaning' does what it says, you still have to do some of the work cleaning the glass, shelves, racks and runners. The different types of cleaning offered with these models are:

Catalytic liners Often referred to as 'self-cleaning' surfaces, these liners work by absorbing fat splatters. For the liners to work well, you need to regularly heat the oven to 250°C for an hour, with the shelves and runners removed, to burn off the splatters. If they are heavily soiled they need to be removed and soaked in warm soapy water for at least two hours and wiped clean with a soft cloth. If you care for them well they should last a long time, although they'll need to be replaced eventually. (However, BOSCH claims its liners 'regenerate' and won't need replacing at all.) While some of the models on test come with the liners as part of the purchase price, others are available at an additional cost.

Pyrolytic cleaning A true self-cleaner, a pyrolytic oven heats up to about 500°C when it's set on self-cleaning mode, turning any food residue into ash, which you wipe away when the oven cools. But you'll need to remove the shelves and runners first.

FOR PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

- The CHEF is worth considering for anyone with upper limb dysfunction, as it has good shelf stability and T-bar controls that are suitable for a universal turner.
- For someone with a cognitive impairment, the CHEF and the WESTINGHOUSE have basic controls with clear written labelling that's easy to comprehend.
- None of the ovens on test is suitable for a person in a wheelchair as they don't have side-opening doors. Nor are any of the models particularly suitable for someone with vision impairment, as they're all stainless steel with small labels on the controls.

What to buy \$

CHEF EOC644S	\$849
SMEG SA504X (A)	\$1490
MIELE H 4212 B	\$1599
WESTINGHOUSE POP668S	\$1319

(A) Discontinued but may be in some stores.

How to get the best from your oven

Multifunction ovens can combine five or more cooking options all in the one oven, but the more you have, the more confusing it can be — and more expensive. The main functions are the following ones. All the models on test have these features unless stated otherwise.

Fan-forced is what you'll use most often and it's great for cooking different kinds of food at the same time on different shelves, as long as they all need the same cooking temperature. Heat is circulated by a fan for even distribution. This works best for roasts, cakes, casseroles and baked foods. Temperatures and cooking times are reduced slightly compared with the conventional cooking function. Preheating the oven is necessary for most foods.

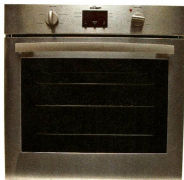
Top and bottom elements Conventional or traditional cooking uses the top and bottom elements and is good for baking delicate foods and foods that need more cooking on the base. The temperature is usually slightly higher and a longer cooking time is needed than with fan-forced. Preheating is necessary. All have this except the SMEG.

Bottom element and fan, or fan-assisted baking The bottom element is ideal for cooking pastries, pies, pizzas and foods that require a crisp cooked base. Fan-assisted cooking uses the top element too, but the majority of the heat is directed at the bottom of the food, while the fan assists the heat to cook the filling. Food is usually placed on the bottom shelf or close to it. You'll need to preheat to get the best results. All the tested models except the BLANCO, CHEF, MIELE and SMEG have this feature.

Grill element In most multifunction ovens the grill is inside the oven. A grill element is useful for foods that only need a short cooking time, such as cheese on toast or browning the top of *au gratin* dishes. The maximum temperature is usually required but preheating isn't necessary. The best position for the food is usually the top shelf. Some ovens, including the WHIRLPOOL in this test, have variable heat control for the grill, which can help to get better results when grilling delicate foods such as fish. >

If you do a lot of grilling, it's a good idea to have catalytic self-cleaning panels on the oven top, sides and walls.

Profiles



85% CHEF
EOC644S

PRICE \$849

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent grill and oven performance.
- Relatively cheap.
- Moulded shelf supports are easy to clean.

BAD POINTS

- Catalytic liners are not available for this model.



78% MIELE
H 4212 B

PRICE \$1599

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent grill performance.
- Very good oven performance.

BAD POINTS

- No grill rack supplied. The manufacturer recommends using the shelf with the oven tray positioned below, but this is hard to clean. An extra wire shelf and grill tray insert (to minimise flare-ups and drain to the grill tray beneath) is available, but costs extra.
- Only one shelf supplied.
- Catalytic liner on the back wall only.
- The front of the grill element is slightly exposed.
- Poor result for custard tart, which means the oven didn't cope well with cooking a combination food.



81% SMEG
SA504X

PRICE \$1490

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent grill performance.
- Very good oven performance.
- Catalytic liners on back and sides of walls, with good coverage.
- Pull-out grill element shield for cleaning.

BAD POINTS

- Grill rack is fiddly to clean.
- Scored only 55% for cooking custard tart, which means the oven didn't cope well with cooking a combination food.
- Shelves tilt when pulled out, allowing dishes to slide.



78% WESTINGHOUSE
POP668S

PRICE \$1319

GOOD POINTS

- The easiest to use.
- Excellent result for cooking sponge cake, meringues and pizza.
- Smokeless grill tray.
- Catalytic liners on back and sides of walls, with good coverage.

BAD POINTS

- Scored only 50% for roasting chicken.
- Shelves tilt when pulled out, allowing dishes to slide, however, the manufacturer claims it has now rectified this problem.

< Fan/grill This function is useful for grilling cuts of meat such as sausages, chicken, cutlets or fish, and it combines the fan with the grill element. The door is closed during cooking and cooking times and temperatures are reduced. The shelf position is usually second or third from the element, and preheating is usually not necessary.

However, grilling meat in the oven cavity can leave your oven smelly and splattered with fat and grease. If you do a lot of grilling it's a good idea to have catalytic self-cleaning panels fixed to the top, sides and back walls of the oven. Make sure they have good coverage of the walls. >

About the rest

- The ELECTROLUX's function display has suggested temperature guides, which can be adjusted. However, the digital display isn't very bright and could be difficult to read.
- The BLANCO has a handy beeping noise when it reaches its preheat temperature. But it has no stopper when pulling out the grill tray, and nor do the BOSCH and GLEM models.
- The grill racks on the BLANCO and FISHER & PAYKEL are fiddly to clean, while the WHIRLPOOL and GLEM have limited access to the back of the grill tray.

What to look for

USEFUL GRILL FEATURES

- A **grill tray** should be easy to slide in and out and should come out far enough for you to place food at the back. Look for a safety stop mechanism to stop it from pulling right out.
- A **smokeless grill tray** traps fat and grease below it, rather than under a wire rack. This is important for an internal grill as splattering and smoking fat can be messy.
- The grill **element** should be set high into the ceiling or have a shield so that it isn't exposed and can't be accidentally touched. This is particularly important if you place the oven under the bench.
- At least two **grill tray heights** are best.

DOOR

- Light and **easy to open**, and stays open in any position without falling fully open or slamming shut. If you choose a side-opening door, check that the hinges are in the right place to suit your kitchen layout.
- A large enough **window** that allows a good view inside.

MODELS ON TEST

All the tested models have a stainless steel exterior, which takes extra effort to clean, and a grill tray that can be used as a baking tray.

USEFUL INTERIOR FEATURES

- Check the **usable space** by measuring inside the oven (or taking along a large baking dish when shopping around), rather than relying on the stated capacity. You can measure from runner to runner and bottom shelf to grill element, but take care to ensure that you'll really be using the space from the bottom shelf position to the grill element. You'll also need enough space at the sides to move your baking dishes in and out.
- **Shelves** should have a safety stop to prevent them from being pulled out accidentally.
- A good range of **shelf positions**. Three or more shelves can be handy, especially if you want to cook several things at the same time.
- **Tilting** Check that the shelves don't slope down when they're pulled out with a heavy baking dish on them. If the shelves do slope, a guard at the front of the shelf will help stop dishes from falling off but will make it harder to slide heavy dishes in and out.
- **Moulded runners** are easier to clean than metal pull-out runners.

Interior light Check that the bulb is easily replaced.

DISPLAY

- Many **dials** are marked with ambiguous symbols — make sure you can recognise them easily and understand what they mean.
- If you don't have the best eyesight, stainless steel ovens with low-contrast **labelling** can be difficult to read. A plain white model with easy-to-read labels is a better option.

Look for something that's **easy to read**. Digital displays can be difficult if they aren't bright enough and awkward to see if you install your oven under the bench.



Our Home Economist cooked a range of foods to test the various functions of the oven and grill.

HOW WE TESTED

Method We changed the method this time, so it's not possible to compare scores for these ovens with those we've tested previously.

Performance Our CHOICE Home Economist got busy baking a range of delicious treats from meringues and custard tarts to chickens and pizzas. Different foods were cooked to test the various functions of the oven and grill:

- **Grill** She toasted bread to assess the speed, evenness and heating area of each grill, as well as its ability to produce a quantity of evenly toasted bread in a short time. She also grilled sausages to assess the speed and evenness when cooking a fatty food. Grilling sausages also creates a lot of mess in the oven, so it helps our tester assess how easy each model is to clean.
- **Oven** She cooked scones to test how well each oven baked using convection mode at a high temperature, and to find out how evenly it baked. She cooked sponge cakes to check how well the ovens cooked evenly on multiple shelves. Meringues were included to test how

well the models could handle cooking at a low temperature for a long period of time, and custard tarts to see how the ovens handled a combination food and their 'turn-down' capacity. Our tester also cooked a fresh pizza to see how well each model could cook a crisp, firm, golden-brown base, and she roasted a chicken.

Ease of use The ovens were assessed for ease of use, which included the controls, grill, oven and cleaning.



PRODUCT	PERFORMANCE				FUNCTIONS		FEATURES					SPECIFICATIONS		
Brand / model (in rank order)	Overall score (%)	Oven score (%)	Grill score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Bottom element only	Half grill	Clock	Number of shelf positions	Self-cleaning liners	Pyrolytic function	Smokeless grill tray	Controls	Usable oven volume (L)	Internal useable dimensions (mm, H x W x D)*
Chef E0C644S	85	90	90	78	✓	✓	5					Dial	45	260 x 470 x 440
Smeg SA504X (A)	81	80	95	70			4	✓				Dial	42	270 x 440 x 380
Miele H 4212 B	78	82	90	65	✓ (B)		4	✓				Dial	34	255 x 380 x 380
Westinghouse POP668S	78	77	73	83	✓		8 (D)	✓			✓	Dial	50	293 x 460 x 460
Bosch HBN430551A	76	75	83	73	✓		5	✓			✓	Dial	46	300 x 450 x 450
Electrolux E0EE62AS	76	76	75	78	✓	✓	8	✓			✓	Touch	50	290 x 470 x 470
Whirlpool 6AK2452IX	73	82	70	68		(C)	4	✓				Dial	40	270 x 440 x 400
Fisher & Paykel OB60SCEX1	70	83	65	65			4	✓				Dial	43	265 x 430 x 430
Blanco BOSE67X	69	77	60	70	✓ (B)		5	✓				Dial	42	307 x 320 x 320
Glem GF69PI	68	73	65	68	✓		4			✓		Dial	33	250 x 420 x 420

HOW RELIABLE DO SUBSCRIBERS RATE THEIR OVEN?

In our 2007 reliability survey, 79% of the 4330 subscribers who responded owned a wall or underbench oven, and 89% of the ovens were electric. Gas ovens were significantly more likely than electric ovens to have problems with:

- Timers (5%).
- Shelves/runners (2%).
- Ignition systems (6%).

WESTINGHOUSE (20%) and CHEF (11%) were the most commonly owned brands. Overall, 12% of ovens had needed repair in the 12 months before the survey.

The table below shows the results for brands for which we received enough replies to report on (at least 100). Numbers in brackets are the number of responses for each brand. Differences of 8% or more between brands are meaningful.

Brand loyalty

Owners of MIELE and FISHER & PAYKEL were significantly more likely than average to say they would purchase the same brand of oven again, while owners of SIMPSON ovens were significantly less likely than average to say this. As SIMPSON scored no worse than most other brands for reliability, other factors must be affecting the decision whether to buy the brand again or not.

OVENS NOT NEEDING REPAIR IN THE PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS (NUMBER OF RESPONSES)

	%
All ovens (4330)	88
BOSCH (156)	95
MIELE (292)	94
DELONGHI (100)	88
FISHER & PAYKEL (382)	88
BLANCO (189)	87
ILVE (108)	87
SIMPSON (174)	87
SMEG (288)	87
WESTINGHOUSE (874)	87
CHEF (458)	85
KLEENMAID (178)	85

Dimensions (mm, D x W x D)	Contacts	COSTS	
		Running costs (\$/10 years)	Price (\$)
95 x 595 x 566	www.chefappliances.com.au	96	849
95 x 596 x 566	www.smeg-australia.com.au	125	1490
96 x 595 x 566	www.miele.com.au	93	1599
96 x 595 x 566	www.westinghouse.com.au	97	1319
95 x 595 x 548	www.bosch.com.au	107	1899
95 x 595 x 567	www.electrolux.com.au	96	1799
95 x 595 x 564	www.whirlpool.com.au	111	1289
97 x 595 x 567	www.fp.com.au	129	1299
94 x 592 x 561	www.blanco-australia.com	130	1499
91 x 597 x 547	www.glemgas.com.au	113	1899

Did you know?

WHICH FOODS GO ON WHICH SHELVES?

Once you've decided on a cooking mode, it's also important to select the correct shelf position for the food you're cooking.

Pastries, roasts and reheated foods can be set on any shelf when cooked with the fan-forced setting.

Single trays of biscuits, quiches and heavy cakes cook best using the top and bottom elements and should be placed on the middle shelf.

Pizzas, focaccia, bread, meat pies and fruit pies cook best using the bottom element only or bottom element plus fan. These foods should be placed on the bottom shelf or as close to the bottom as possible.

Chicken legs, sausages and baked vegetables suit the fan/grill setting and are best positioned around the middle of the oven.

Chops, cutlets, steaks and fish cutlets should be cooked using the grill element only. Use the top shelf or as close to the top as possible.

USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score is made up of:

- Oven performance: 30%
- Grill performance: 30%
- Ease of use: 40%

Features See *What to look for*, page 47, and *How to get the best from your oven*, page 45, for more on features in the table.

Running costs Based on running the oven at 150°C above room temperature for three hours per week at 15 cents/kWh.

Price Recommended retail, as of July 2008.

TABLE NOTES

* Width is from runner to runner; height is bottom shelf in lowest possible position to grill element; depth is depth of shelves.

(A) Discontinued but may still be available in some stores. It has been replaced with model SCA504X, which has more functions.

(B) Bottom element and fan only.

(C) Multiple heat levels.

(D) Six shelf positions and two telescopic runners for the grill tray and baking tray.

Cooling down and heating the planet

Keeping cool is getting easier, but avoid the inefficient options.

nutshell

► We found big differences in cooling efficiency between models.
► If you live in a cold area, the top three models in the *What to buy* list would suit you, as they heat efficiently too.

Inverter air conditioners, such as the ones in this test, can vary their heating or cooling output to adapt to room conditions. This is more energy-efficient than older models, which essentially have two settings: 100% of their capacity or off.

With more Australians installing air conditioners, more efficient models have become a necessity. CHOICE uses a different, tougher test than that used for the energy rating label, and the good news is that most of the air conditioners on test still roughly matched their rated cooling efficiency. Only the HAIER and MISTRAL tested substantially lower than their rated efficiency (see *How we tested*, page 53, for details).

What to buy \$

MITSUBISHI HEAVY INDUSTRIES SRK632EA-S1 / SRK632E-S1	\$1675
MITSUBISHI HEAVY INDUSTRIES SRK712EA-S1 / SRC712E-S1	\$1816
PANASONIC CS-E24GKR / CU-E24GKR	\$2199
FUJITSU ASTA24LCC / AOTR24LCC	\$2699

We tested five new models and added them to those still available from last year's test to bring you results for 10 large split-system, reverse-cycle inverter air conditioners with claimed capacities of about 7 kW for cooling and 8 kW for heating. They're suitable for large, open-plan living areas. We were unable to include a DAIKIN because it was changing its range at the time of testing.

Alternatives to air conditioning

Buying a large air conditioner is an expensive proposition, requiring ongoing energy costs, so first look at all the other options that might cool you sufficiently. Draughtproof your doors and windows, install blinds, curtains or awnings, insulate your home, plant deciduous trees outside windows or glass doors and reduce your air conditioner use in the car — if you're less used to being cool in the car, you could be less likely to need it at home, plus it will decrease your fuel costs.

If the alternatives don't win you over, choose a reverse-cycle air conditioner that's just as efficient at warming you up next winter — we test for heating as well as cooling efficiency.

PRODUCT	PERFORMANCE						MAXIMUM CAPACITY (kW)			FEATURES
Brand / model (in rank order)	Overall score (%)	Cooling efficiency score (%)	Heating efficiency score (%)	Airflow score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Noise indoors / outdoors	Measured cooling	Measured heating (2°C outside)	Rated heating (7°C outside)	Fan speeds
# Mitsubishi Heavy Industries SRK632EA-S1 / SRK632E-S1	86	81	97	88	70	Quieter / quieter	5.9	6.7	7.1	5
Mitsubishi Heavy Industries SRK712EA-S1 / SRC712E-S1	80	82	77	86	75	Quieter / quieter	6.8	6.6	8.0	5
# Panasonic CS-E24GKR / CU-E24GKR (A)	75	75	80	71	70	Quieter / quieter	6.7	7.0	8.6	7
Fujitsu ASTA24LCC / AOTR24LCC	74	78	67	77	76	Quieter / quieter	6.9	7.1	8.5	4
# Airwell XLV26 / GLV26 (B)	73	78	72	66	65	Quieter / quieter	6.8	6.6	7.1	3
Toshiba RAV-SM802KRT-E / RAV-SM802AT-E	69	71	69	63	73	Quieter / quieter	6.4	6.0	8.0	5
Mitsubishi Electric MSZ-GA71VA / MUZ-GA71VA	63	57	54	80	82	Quieter / quieter	6.3	5.5	8.1	3
Carrier 2PQV080X / 38VYX080N	62	63	59	62	68	Quieter / medium	6.2	6.1	7.6	3
# Haier HSU-26H03 / R2 (DB)	60	52	63	73	60	Quieter / quieter	6.5	6.1	8.1	5
# Mistral MSS6.8INV	54	49	48	69	64	Noisier / noisier	7.0	8.0	7.9	3

The colder side of Australia

An air conditioner's heating efficiency is tested at an outdoor temperature of 7°C for its energy rating label. However, it's not all balmy days and nights throughout Australia, so we conduct our heating test at the alternative conditions described in the Australian standard, using a lower outdoor temperature of 2°C to see how each model copes with tough conditions.

The air conditioners are generally less efficient than they're rated at the lower outdoor temperature. At 2°C the heat exchange coils in the outdoor unit tend to ice up, so the air conditioner has to defrost them before indoor heating can resume.

These defrost cycles generally lower the units' claimed heating capacity by up to 30% and their claimed efficiency by about a quarter to a third. The MITSUBISHI HEAVY INDUSTRIES SRK63 was the most efficient at heating, and the MITSUBISHI HEAVY INDUSTRIES SRK71 and PANASONIC (both also in the *What to buy* list) also rated well — one of these models would be best if you live in a cold area.

Air conditioner factors to consider

Split systems consist of a unit that sits outside your house and contains all the noisy bits needed to condition the air. The indoor part is connected to it by a hose and is installed on a wall so it can blow the conditioned air into your room. Split systems are more efficient and less noisy than cheaper window/wall units and portable air conditioners.

Efficiency This tells you how many kilowatts (kW) of cooling or heating an air conditioner provides per kW of electricity it uses. The more stars on the energy label, the more efficient it is which means the lower the running cost and greenhouse gas emissions.

Of the models on test, MITSUBISHI HEAVY INDUSTRIES SRK71 had the best cooling efficiency when working at half its capacity, whereas the MITSUBISHI HEAVY INDUSTRIES SRK63 had the best cooling efficiency at full capacity, making these two models the best for cooling overall. The next best for cooling efficiency were the FUJITSU and AIRWELL. See *The Colder side of Australia*, left, for the best models for heating efficiency, as well as the table below for the heating efficiency scores of all the models on test.

Airflow The air conditioner's fan circulates the cooled or heated air around the room. Ideally, you want a >

You want a model with multiple fan speeds: from very high to help cool or heat the room quickly, to very low for less noise and no draughts.

AIRWELL IN ADMINISTRATION

For warranty claims on AIRWELL products purchased on or after 1 July 2007, consumers should ring Seely Products on 1300 656 099. For anyone who purchased an Airwell product on or before 30 June 2007, warranties are no longer being honoured. Consumers can make their own arrangements for repair and lodge a creditor's claim with jakwok@deloitte.com.au.

SPECIFICATIONS						COSTS	
Quiet operation	Fan only mode	Sleep mode	Dimensions, indoor unit (cm, H x W x D)	Refrigerant	Contact	Yearly running cost (\$)	Price (\$)
✓	✓	✓	32 x 110 x 26	R410A	www.mhi.net.au	280	1675
	✓	✓	32 x 120 x 25	R410A	www.mhi.net.au	310	1816
✓			28 x 91 x 24	R410A	www.panasonic.com.au	310	2199
✓	✓	✓	32 x 100 x 23	R410A	www.fujitsu-general.com.au	330	2699
	✓	✓	29 x 101 x 23	R410A	www.airwell.com.au	320	1617
✓	✓		30 x 100 x 23	R410A	www.toshiba-aircon.com.au	340	2000
			33 x 110 x 26	R410A	www.mitsubishi-electric.com.au	380	2317
	✓	✓	30 x 108 x 20	R410A	www.carrier.com.au	360	2009
✓	✓	✓	31 x 115 x 24	R410A	www.haier.com.au	380	1150
	✓	✓	32 x 104 x 22	R22	www.mistral.com.au	410	899

USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score is made up of:

- Cooling efficiency: 40%
- Heating efficiency: 30%
- Airflow: 20%
- Ease of use: 10%

We weighted cooling efficiency higher than heating efficiency because reverse-cycle air conditioners are more often used for cooling than heating in Australia.

Measured capacity Reverse-cycle air conditioners are sold with rated heating and cooling capacities — you choose one based on the cooling and heating capacity required for your room(s). Shown in the table is the highest capacity we measured for cooling, and for heating at 2°C, plus the rated heating capacity at 7°C.

Refrigerant See *About the rest*, page 52.

Yearly running costs We calculated how much each model costs to deliver 3000 kWh of cooling (1500 kWh at full capacity, 1500 kWh at part capacity) and 3000 kWh of heating per year, based on electricity costs of 15 cents/kWh. We didn't include standby cost (power used when the air conditioner is plugged in but not operating), as based on previous tests it's likely to be only a few dollars a year.

Price Recommended retail, as of July 2008.

TABLE NOTES

† Newly tested models.

(A) About to be replaced by a new model, CS/CU-E24HXR

(B) See Airwell in administration, above, for information about the warranty.

Adjustable
louvers
distribute
the air more
evenly —
point them
up with
cool air
and down
with warm.

< model with a wide airflow range (multiple fan speeds): from very high to help the room cool or heat quickly, to very low so there's less noise and no unpleasant draught once you have the right temperature.

Our tests found both MITSUBISHI HEAVY INDUSTRIES models and the MITSUBISHI ELECTRIC have the best combination of high and low fan settings. The MITSUBISHI HEAVY INDUSTRIES SRK63 has the most powerful maximum fan setting, which helps cool or heat a room quickly. These three models also have a 'low fan' setting with comparatively little airflow, so you're more likely to find a setting that doesn't feel like you're sitting in a wind tunnel, while still moving some air about.

Noise A noisy indoor unit can interfere with your conversation, entertainment or sleep. And most local councils have noise restrictions relating to the use of air conditioners: check before you buy, especially if the outdoor part of the system has to be installed close to your neighbour. We tested the noise in the air conditioners' quietest modes and found most models to be similarly quiet. The exception was the MISTRAL, which was noisy both indoors and outdoors.

Ease of use This covers the remote control, instructions and timer, as well as the ease of removing and refitting the air filters for cleaning. The MITSUBISHI ELECTRIC scored very well for ease of use, while the HAIER ranked the lowest. There's not much difference between the rest. ■

Profiles



86% MITSUBISHI HEAVY INDUSTRIES SRK63ZE-S1 / SRK63ZE-S1

PRICE \$1675

GOOD POINTS

- Very good cooling efficiency.
- Excellent heating efficiency at 2°C.
- Very good airflow range.
- Comparatively low yearly running cost.

BAD POINTS

- None to mention.



80% MITSUBISHI HEAVY INDUSTRIES SRK71ZE-S1 / SRC71ZE-S1

PRICE \$1816

GOOD POINTS

- Very good cooling efficiency.
- Good heating efficiency at 2°C.
- Very good airflow range.

BAD POINTS

- No 'quiet' mode.



75% PANASONIC CS-E24GKR / CU-E24GKR

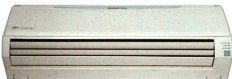
PRICE \$2199

GOOD POINTS

- Good cooling efficiency.
- Very good heating efficiency at 2°C.
- Good airflow range.

BAD POINTS

- No fan only mode.
- No sleep mode.



74% FUJITSU ASTA24LCC / AOTR24LCC

PRICE \$2699

GOOD POINTS

- Good cooling efficiency.
- Good airflow range.

BAD POINTS

- No fast operation.

About the rest

- The AIRWELL missed the *What to buy* list because of its airflow and ease of use scores. Also see *Airwell in administration*, page 51.
- The TOSHIBA also has a lower score for airflow.
- The MITSUBISHI ELECTRIC and CARRIER have comparatively low heating and cooling efficiency scores.
- In our tests at half capacity, the HAIER varied the temperature by 1.4°C, a large variation compared with the models on test.
- The MISTRAL was let down by its cooling and heating efficiency. It's also the only model to use R22 as a cooling agent, which has the potential to damage the ozone layer. All the others use R410A, which doesn't contribute to ozone depletion.

! WANT MORE INFO?

At choice.com.au you can read our articles on heating and cooling options, including calculators that help you estimate the heating and cooling capacity required for your room(s). Type 'heating options' or 'cooling options' in the search box.

What to look for

AIR CONDITIONER BASICS

- **Size/capacity** To get the most from an air conditioner, match its cooling and/or heating capacity to your room. Use the CHOICE cooling and heating calculators to determine the right size air conditioner for your room (see *Want more info?*, below left).
- **Energy efficiency** Once you've worked out what capacity you need, compare the star ratings of models of similar capacity — the more stars the better. Note that star ratings are different for heating and cooling — see the picture and caption, below, for more on this.
- **Automatic de-icing** If you live in a cold area, frost may build up on the outdoor heat exchanger coils in winter if the air conditioner doesn't have this function (all the tested ones do).
- **Connections** Larger capacity models (more than 2.4 kW of input) like those tested can't be plugged into a normal power point and need a special connection.



Energy efficiency labels The numbers in the top blue and red boxes give the product's cooling and heating capacity. The star rating always refers to heating at 7°C. The 'all options' label, pictured, also lists in fine print the product's heating capacity at 2°C. The higher the number of stars, the more efficient it is (efficiency is calculated by dividing the output capacity by the input power).

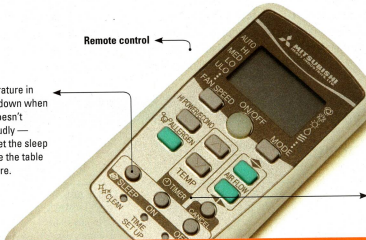
USEFUL FEATURES

Unless it's stated otherwise, all the air conditioners tested have the following features:

- **Most models** (not MITSUBISHI ELECTRIC and PANASONIC) have a **sleep** or a **'one-hour-off' timer**.
- **Operating modes:**
Auto Automatically chooses the mode required to keep the room at the chosen temperature.
Cool Pumps heat from inside to the outside.
Heat Pumps heat from the outside to the inside.
Dry Dehumidifies the air (while cooling only slightly).
Fan only Blows air without heating, cooling or drying. This can be useful when it's not hot enough to justify running the air conditioner and all you want is a bit of a cooling breeze. In our test, the FUJITSU, PANASONIC and MITSUBISHI ELECTRIC don't have this function.
- Some models (see the table for details) have settings with reduced noise (**quiet operation**) and/or extra-high power (**fast or jet operation**).
- **Adjustable louvres** allow the air to be distributed more evenly — point them up with cool air and down with warm. All models in this test let you do this with the remote control which is the better option, and they have auto-swing. You can also manually adjust the vertical louvres on the HAIER and horizontal louvres on the AIRWELL, HAIER, MISTRAL and TOSHIBA.
- **Restart delay** This protective feature prevents the air conditioners from starting up again too soon after being switched off.

A **sleep mode** adjusts the temperature in several steps (up when cooling, down when heating) so the air conditioner doesn't have to work as hard — or as loudly — when you're sleeping. You can set the sleep mode for as long as you like. See the table for which models have this feature.

Remote control



A **timer** lets you switch the air conditioner on and/or off automatically at certain times. All the tested models have one, but they aren't always as good as they could be. Ideally, it should indicate status and settings at all times. It's difficult to see the settings on the AIRWELL and CARRIER. All the models except the MISTRAL have a real-time clock, which makes it easy to set on/off times.

HOW WE TESTED

Cooling and heating efficiency Using the test room and climate conditions specified in the Australian standard, our testers operated the air conditioners continuously at their maximum thermostat and fan settings. This is different from the test manufacturers use for the energy label, where the air conditioner's output can be fixed at a particular level. As that's not how an inverter would operate in real life, and since the fixed level varies from model to model, we think our test is more realistic and allows for a better comparison. However, our results are a worst-case efficiency scenario, as most of the time inverters will run at lower than their

maximum capacity. That's why in addition our testers measured the units' cooling efficiency at 50% of the measured cooling capacity.

Airflow The testers measured the indoor airflow (in litres per second) on the highest and lowest fan settings.

Ease of use They assessed the ease of use of the remote controls, instruction manuals and timers, as well as the ease of removing and refitting the air filters for cleaning.

Noise The testers measured the noise levels of the indoor unit with the fan on the lowest possible setting, and the outdoor unit while it was installed in our test room.



Taking the plunge

Do automatic pool cleaners really take the hard work out of cleaning your pool?

nutshell

► Most of the pool cleaners did the job they're designed for, except the Astral, which often flipped onto its back and got stuck on the lip of the pool.

► Don't expect a pool cleaner to be completely hassle-free. They can't clean really dirty pools or deal with every situation they're exposed to, and they all need a little help at times.

There are three types of pool cleaner on the market: suction, pressure and robotic. Most pool cleaners you'll come across are suction models — they're the most visible in the market, cost less than other types and are easy to install. We tested seven suction cleaners, ranging in price from \$527 to \$895. They're all designed to clean hard pool surfaces such as concrete, pebble, acrylic and tiles.

Suction cleaners are usually fixed by a hose to the pool's skimmer box, which filters the leaves, and are propelled by the force of water running from the leaf filter to the pool pump. The design of the cleaner's head and surround (which ranges from futuristic to bug-like) is what makes or breaks the performance of a pool cleaner, but unfortunately you can't tell how well it will work by looking at it.

The tested pool cleaners come in two main types, which both use suction to clean as well as to climb the pool walls. One type works by stopping the flow of water and starting it again, making a pulsing action. This action can be provided by a diaphragm, ball or hammer

movement in the head of the cleaner; these are called inertia-driven cleaners. The second type has gears that funnel water into a drive that propels the feet or wheels.

Pressure cleaners also work with the pool pump, using a combination of suction and jet action; while robotic cleaners, which are electric and self-propelled, function independently of the pool pump system.

Easy to install

You can install a pool cleaner yourself or have it installed by your local swimming pool maintenance store. We found all the models easy to install except the KREEPY KRAULY, which required a little more fiddling to assemble. All of them come with hoses to attach them to the pool's skimmer box, and all the hoses are supplied in sectioned lengths, except the KREEPY KRAULY, which comes in a single length.

Once it's assembled and installed, the only time you should have to deal with the pool cleaner is to put it in the pool to clean it and remove it when clearing a blockage or using the pool.

What to buy

96% ZODIAC G2

PRICE \$625

GOOD POINTS

- Rarely stops.
- Rarely needs supervision.
- Climbs walls and even lower steps easily.
- Easy to adjust.
- Easy to unblock and clean.

BAD POINTS

- Leaves tend to float overhead instead of being scooped in.



87% KREEPY KRAULY MARATHON

PRICE \$835

GOOD POINTS

- Rarely stops.
- Rarely needs supervision.
- Easy to unblock and clean.
- Climbs walls easily.

BAD POINTS

- The initial assembly is complicated.
- The hose comes coiled and needs to be stretched.



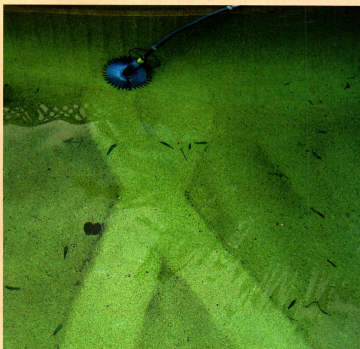
HOW WE TESTED

Performance We used a 55,000 L concrete pool with a 1 HP pump to power the suction cleaners. Our tester dirtied the pool using common debris such as twigs, pebbles, gumnuts, soil, sand and small and large leaves. During testing the pool was kept at a constant 22°C and the pH level was kept neutral. We then ran the pool cleaner for several hours to assess how well it cleaned the pool.

If the cleaner had blockages during its cleaning time, the number of blockages was scored.

Any other stoppages not caused by blockages (such as a cleaner getting stuck or falling onto its back and having to be manually turned over) were also taken into account.

Ease of use was assessed on how easy the instructions were to understand, and how easy the cleaner was to assemble, unblock and adjust.



None of the pool cleaners can clean a very dirty pool, so you will need to scrub it yourself at the start of each season.

Great expectations

You might expect that once you've installed a pool cleaner, the days of manual scrubbing are finished. However, none of the pool cleaners claims to be able to clean a very dirty pool, so you will need to clean it yourself at the beginning of each season or if you haven't run the cleaner for a while.

In addition, regardless of how much research and design has gone into the pool cleaners, they find it difficult to deal with every situation they're exposed to and all need a little help at times. We subjected the cleaners to difficult test conditions using a variety of common pool debris to see how they'd cope:

- The two best cleaners, the ZODIAC and the KREEPY KRAULY, took a while to clean the pool but hardly required any attention to clear blockages.

About the rest

- THE POOL CLEANER performed well but isn't as easy to use as the two models in the *What to buy* list. It needs dismantling to remove debris, though this isn't difficult to do.
- The PENTAIR is very easy to use, but was let down by the number of blockages it experienced during testing.
- The HAYWARD and the KLEVER KLEENA were let down by both ease of use and performance. Both had many blockages during testing, and both required dismantling with a screwdriver to remove debris.
- See *Not recommended*, right, for comments on the ASTRAL.

- THE POOL CLEANER and PENTAIR were also good but required a little more attention to clear blockages.
- The HAYWARD and KLEVER KLEENA both had difficulty during the cleaning process due to frequent blockages. We found these last two were less likely to stick to the walls and more likely to need pulling apart when they were stopped by a blockage.

Inertia-driven cleaners are claimed to take a random cleaning path and geared cleaners a designed path. However, in our test two of the best cleaners, the ZODIAC (inertia) and THE POOL CLEANER (geared), both had a habit of patrolling the same areas over and over. A pool cleaner tends to follow the direction of the hose attached to the skimmer box and you might need to intervene if you notice it continually moving over the same area.

If your pool has steps, only the ZODIAC managed to climb the lower pool steps and clean them.

Not recommended

While the ASTRAL was easy to use, we can't recommend it due to its habit of falling onto its back after climbing the walls, and having to be manually righted. It would also climb up the wall, get stuck on the lip of the pool and suck in air, which isn't healthy for the pool pump. >

PRODUCT	PERFORMANCE			SPECIFICATIONS			
Brand / model (in rank order)	Overall score (%)	Performance score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Type of mechanism	Pipe length supplied (m)*	Contact	Price (\$)
Zodiac G2	96	93	100	Inertia	12.0	www.zodiac.com.au	625
Kreepy Krauly Marathon	87	83	92	Inertia	9.3	www.kreepykrauly.com.au	835
The Pool Cleaner 2 wheel	79	83	72	Gear	11.0	www.linc.com.au	895
Pentair Pool Shark	74	60	96	Gear	10.0	www.pentairwater.com.au	527
Hayward Pool Vac Ultra	50	43	60	Gear	13.0	www.cleva.com.au	700
Kleever Kleena Sprinta	49	47	52	Gear	12.0	www.kreepykrauly.com.au	799
NOT RECOMMENDED							
Astral Pool Conga	(A)	(A)	88	Inertia	11.0	www.hurlcon.com.au	795

USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score is made up of:

- Performance: 60%
- Ease of use: 40%

Type of mechanism See page 54 for an explanation of how inertia-driven and geared suction cleaners work.

Price Recommended retail, as of July 2008. But shop around — we found big differences between the recommended retail and what we paid.

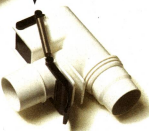
TABLE NOTES

* Extra lengths can be purchased.
(A) The Astral pool cleaner couldn't clean the pool without constant intervention and so couldn't be scored for performance.

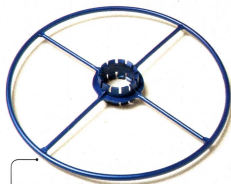
Pool cleaners can't deal with every situation they're exposed to and need help at times, especially to clear blockages.

What to look for

POOL CLEANER BASICS



Control accessories All pool cleaners should be adjustable to some degree to cope with the myriad different pool shapes and sizes. These adjustments can be **weights** to adjust the hose buoyancy, a **flow indicator** to judge how strong the water pressure is from the pump and a **flow regulator** at the skimmer box to adjust the main flow.



Deflector Some pool cleaners, such as the ZODIAC, KREEPY KRAULY and ASTRAL, are supplied with a mechanism to deflect it from the corners of a pool so the cleaner is less likely to become stuck in one place. This is useful for pools with tight corners.

STORAGE AND SAFETY

- **Storage** How you store your hoses can directly affect how well the cleaner performs. Always store hoses in straight lengths; if they're stored curled up they can keep a 'memory' of this shape and influence the direction the cleaner takes in the pool.
- **Safety** Observe commonsense precautions when using a suction pool cleaner: always turn it off when you're clearing a blockage and remove it from the pool when people (particularly kids) are swimming.

Hose length All the cleaners come supplied with a set of hoses, sometimes in one long piece and sometimes in sections that need to be joined together. Look for one that supplies enough hose to clean the length of your pool. It should have enough to reach from one end of the pool to the other, plus a metre or two. For all the tested products you can get additional hose sections or longer single lengths.





Fiddling on the roof

A car roof box is great for increasing your car's storage capacity, but it can increase fuel consumption by 11%.

nutshell

► The major difference between the eight models on test was ease of use.
► The addition of a car roof box will change the way your car handles — and increase your fuel consumption.

Car storage space can be difficult to find on a road trip, with your boot stuffed to the brim or certain items that just don't fit. Car roof boxes are designed to fit onto the roof rack of a car to solve this lack of space. We had a look at eight models, priced from \$375 to \$895, and found that their ease of use varies substantially.

The boxes we looked at range from small to large, based on a combination of volume, length and carrying capacity. We scored usability issues such as ease of fitting, loading and locking. We also tested a variety of issues related to car handling and we conducted rain and noise tests, but we found little difference between the boxes and so didn't score these aspects. We then checked the fuel consumption with the widest box fitted to the car.

Putting it on

Fitting the box to the roof bars can be a chore in itself, depending on the height and width of the car and the type of fasteners supplied. Both the medium and large THULE boxes were the easiest to secure to the roof racks or bars due to their streamlined design, using clamps that are integrated into the box. When you rotate knobs inside the boxes the clamps grab onto the roof bars, once you have the box in the right position.

What to buy \$

LARGE	
THULE Atlantis 780	\$895
MEDIUM	
THULE Pacific 200	\$649
SMALL	
RHINO RACK Probox 310	\$375

Five of the other boxes require U-bolts to be pushed around the bars underneath the box and secured with nuts from the inside. Both the medium ROLA and large RHINO boxes need two people to fix the box to the roof bars. The small ROLA has four U-shaped hooks permanently fixed with nuts that have to be pushed in and straightened from inside the tray. This can be done with one person, but access is difficult.

The more difficult a box is to put on, the more likely you'll leave it on permanently — not a good solution, as it's likely to increase fuel consumption (see *Driving matters*, page 58). Fitting the boxes to the station wagon used for the test was already quite difficult, so those planning to buy a box for a 4WD could need a ladder to help attach it to the roof.

Filling it up

The boxes have to be loaded after they've been fixed to the car, which is not particularly easy to do with any of the boxes. The narrower the box, the further you have to reach to push your load in. That means lifting your piece of luggage up till it's level with the edge of the box, then sliding it in. It helped that the medium-sized RHINO was considerably wider than the others and so the side of the box was closer to the edge of the car.

Some boxes have straps for securing items. This is useful, as constant braking and accelerating can move the contents around inside the box, especially on long trips or if the box isn't fully loaded. The small and medium RHINOs and the medium THULE didn't have any securing straps (but THULE has informed us it now provides two straps with this box). >

HOW WE TESTED

Fitting to roof bars Our testers assessed how easy it was to fit the boxes to a medium-sized station wagon, whether using bolts or clamps.

Loading and unloading the boxes were assessed with a variety of different-sized items. It's affected by the height of the box from ground level and so will vary from car to car, but the scores are comparative.

Lock and lid opening access were scored based on their location.

For example, a lock/lid opening on the driver's side may seem intuitive, but when the car is stopped at the side of the road you'd be opening the box on the traffic side.

Performance Our tester assessed how the boxes affect cornering, braking, a double lane change, how noisy they were and whether rain got inside the boxes. The differences between boxes weren't significant enough to score.

Fuel consumption Measured on the same car with and without the widest roof box, to give an estimation only of whether a box increases fuel consumption.

Profiles

Large



83% THULE
Atlantis 780

PRICE \$895

GOOD POINTS

- Very easy to fit to the roof bars.
- The lock and lid access are from both the driver and passenger sides, which is the best design.

BAD POINTS

- Fairly difficult to load and unload the box.

Medium



70% THULE
Pacific 200

PRICE \$649

GOOD POINTS

- Very easy to fit to the roof bars.
- The lock and lid access are from the passenger side, which is a safe option.

BAD POINTS

- Fairly difficult to load and unload the box.

Small



57% RHINO RACK
Probox 310

PRICE \$375

GOOD POINTS

- Fairly easy to fit to the roof bars.

BAD POINTS

- Fairly difficult to load and unload the box.
- The lock and lid access are from the back, which isn't as safe or convenient as passenger-side access.

Having access and locks only on the driver's side can be dangerous if you can't park off the street.

< Opening it up

An ideal situation when opening the box would be if it opened and locked from either side. Only the large THULE has this feature. The next best option would be to have the lid opening on the passenger side, away from traffic. The medium ROLA and THULE have this type of lid. The small RHINO and THULE and the medium RHINO open and lock at the back, which is less than ideal for reach. Access and locks on the driver side only is a more dangerous option if you can't pull off the street.

Driving matters

Our tester found that driving with a fully loaded car roof box changes the centre of gravity, and has a slightly negative impact on the car's cornering and braking. He found the same outcome with a double lane change (swerving out of one lane into another, and then back). While all fully laden boxes affect driving, the difference between the boxes was too marginal to score. The difference in noise was also too slight to score.

We tested fuel consumption by driving more than 800 km without a car roof box attached and then with the widest (empty) car roof box over the same stretch of road. The overall weight of the car was the same on both trips. We found that 11% more fuel was used when driving with the box. This is indicative and is likely to vary depending on the car roof box and your speed.

None of the boxes allowed water to enter the inside during our rain test. ■

About the rest

- The medium-sized RHINO had good scores for fitting to the roof bars and loading and unloading, but only scored 60% for its rear-opening lid and lock.
- The other boxes are more difficult to use — their lid opens only on the driver's side, they're harder to load and unload or difficult to fit.

PRODUCT	PERFORMANCE	
	Overall score (%)	Fitting score (%)
Brand / model (in rank order within groups)		
LARGE		
Thule Atlantis 780	83	90
Rhino Rack Carver Carry All 8.4 (A)	55	50
MEDIUM		
Thule Pacific 200	70	80
Rhino Rack Probox 420	67	70
Rola Odyssey OLB450	53	30
SMALL		
Rhino Rack Probox 310	57	60
Thule Ocean 80	53	60
Rola Velocity VLB320	43	40

What to look for

CAR ROOF BOX BASICS

- **Lock location** Access and locks on both the passenger and driver sides allow easy and safe retrieval of luggage, whether you're stopped by the side of the road or at your final destination.
- **Load-securing devices** The more belts a box comes with, the more secure the luggage. Look for a box with at least one.



Fastening mechanism Look for a box that has smooth covers over the inside of the fastening mechanism. If fasteners such as U-bolts protrude into the box, take care not to pack anything over them that could be damaged. See *Putting it on*, page 57, for more on fastening mechanisms — some make it much easier than others.



Put heavier items in the car boot and lighter ones in the car roof box — they're easier to lift and will have less effect on the car's centre of gravity.

USING A CAR ROOF BOX

- **Handling of the car** Our tests showed slight variations in handling when a fully laden box was attached to the car; the extra weight made a difference during cornering and emergency avoidance manoeuvres with a slightly longer braking distance and slightly slower maximum speed through corner. Be ready to adapt your driving to compensate for these differences.
- **Installation** The weight of the boxes in our test ranged from 8–20 kg, but they're all large. Get some help lifting them onto the car, to avoid any damage to yourself or the car. Securing them can be difficult due to the fixing mechanism and the height of the bars from ground level. Using a stepladder can

make it less risky. Don't forget to take the extra height into account when parking in a covered car park.

- **Loading the car** Putting heavier items in the boot of the car and lighter items in the car roof box will make sure the centre of gravity isn't changed too much and mean you don't need to lift up the heavier items. When putting items in the box, evenly distribute and secure them with straps if possible. If you have a slim box or a wide car, the box will sit further away from the side of the car, making loading and retrieval of luggage more difficult.
- **Auto carwash** Most of the roof box manuals warn against putting the roof box through an automatic carwash.

FEATURES		SPECIFICATIONS						
Opening side	Straps	Dimensions (cm. L x W x H)	Weight (kg)	Claimed volume (L)	Claimed maximum load (kg)	Contact	Price (£)	
Passenger / driver	3	196 x 78 x 44	17.7	480	75 (C)	www.thule.com.au	895	
Driver	2	215 x 90 x 40	19.4	502	80 (C)	www.rhinorack.com	840	
Passenger	0 (B)	175 x 82 x 45	12.3	460	50	www.thule.com.au	649	
Rear	0	150 x 99 x 40	14.6	420	50	www.rhinorack.com	460	
Passenger	2	175 x 82 x 45	12.0	450	50	www.rola.com.au	499	
Rear	0	134 x 79 x 38	10.7	310	50	www.rhinorack.com	375	
Rear	1 (B)	133 x 86 x 37	9.2	320	50	www.thule.com.au	399	
Driver	2	132 x 78 x 36	7.9	320	50	www.rola.com.au	399	

USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score is weighted equally among:

- Ease of fitting to roof bars.
- Loading and unloading.
- Lid opening and lock access.

For more on the tests see *How we tested*, page 57.

Price are recommended retail, as of May/June 2008.

TABLE NOTES

(A) Discontinued, but may still be available.

(B) The manufacturer says two straps are now supplied with this model.

(C) Check that your car and roof rack are rated to carry at least 100 kg (load plus weight of box) before buying these boxes.



Play it safe

CHOICE testers found just one playpen they considered completely safe — is it time for Australia to develop a standard for these children's products?

nutshell

► There's no mandatory or voluntary Australian standard for playpens and, as a result, some of the models we tested have safety hazards.

► Just one model, the PLEBANI, passed all the stringent safety tests we put it through.

It comes as quite a shock to parents when their formerly immobile baby becomes a fearless little explorer — who can one second be playing contentedly on the lounge room floor and the next be emptying the kitchen cupboards. To avoid that dreaded “where are they?” moment during times when you can't keep a constant watch, a playpen can bring some peace of mind.

But there's a catch. As there's no mandatory or voluntary Australian standard for playpens, some models currently on the market pose safety risks to your child — such as sharp edges or protrusions to bump, and the possibility of trapping their head, fingers or arms between gaps. CHOICE tested 10 playpens, priced between \$100 and \$300, to see just how safe they are — and we weren't too happy with the results.

One to recommend

In tests devised by CHOICE (using a set of safety requirements and test procedures based on various Australian and overseas standards for children's products, as well as the Product Safety Framework for nursery products), only one model, the PLEBANI Recinto, passed with flying colours, and it's the only model we recommend without reservations. This means the playpen doesn't have any unacceptable finger, limb or head entrapment hazards and passes all other safety requirements.

If a playpen failed any of the other safety requirements, our testers assessed whether it presented an unacceptable risk of injury, taking into account how the playpen would be used. If the risk was found to be minor, the playpen was rated ‘worth considering’.

The LINDAM Safe & Secure and the BABY DAN BabyDen/Park'A'Kid fall into this category, as their problems are considered relatively minor: hinges that stick out and a small risk of trapping a limb. However, these are also the heaviest and most expensive of all those tested.

The rest of the playpens failed

The other seven playpens in this test fail to provide a risk-free environment for a child and therefore aren't recommended by CHOICE. All of them have a limb entrapment hazard except for the JOLLY KIDZ Jolly Wooden and the KIDDY COTS. These have a head entrapment hazard — our test probe (which simulates a child's head) can pass between two vertical rods with a small amount of force but is difficult to pull out again. The manufacturers of the KIDDY COTS and the JOLLY KIDZ have since told us they're changing their playpens to remove these hazards.

Except the GRACO, all these playpens also partially lifted from the ground when a small force was applied, and several pose climbing and clothes-snagging risks.

The BABY DAN, GRACO, LINDAM and NORTH STATES models also pose a risk to an adult's hands and fingers, as they have ‘pinch points’ when folding and unfolding them. For a complete list of the safety tests we conducted on the playpens, see *How we tested*, far right.

Several manufacturers, however, disagreed with our results. They argued:

- The LINDAM is tested to the European standard for playpens.
- The KIDDY COTS and NORTH STATES are tested to US standards.
- The VALCO is tested to the European standard for cots and folding cots.
- JOLLY KIDZ' manufacturer, Sunbury, evaluates its playpens against the Australian Product Safety Framework.

While we stand by our test results, it's encouraging that in the absence of an Australian standard, manufacturers have sought other standards and safety guidelines to test their products against. >

What to buy

Recommended: passed all CHOICE safety tests

PLEBANI Recinto ART 044

PRICE \$149

GOOD POINTS

- Can be pulled apart and stacked for moving or storage.
- Reasonably easy to assemble and pull apart.
- Fairly easy to move, as it keeps its form well.
- Easy to put in and take out a child.
- Has a mattress.

BAD POINTS

- Relatively heavy.



BEST BUY

Worth considering: minor safety hazards

INDAM Safe & Secure LD124

PRICE \$250

GOOD POINTS

- Can be set up in various configurations.
- Foldable for moving or storage.
- Has a mattress.
- Latched gate, which means you don't have to lean over the high sides to reach the child.
- Easy to use.

BAD POINTS

- Failed minor safety tests — hinges protrude and there's minor chance of trapping a limb.
- Requires some effort to unfold and fold — a tool is required.
- Not easy to move as it's heavy and doesn't keep its form well.
- Has no designated handle when folded.
- Care must be taken to avoid the finger pinch points when folding.
- Relatively heavy.



BABY DAN BabyDen/Park'A'Kid

PRICE \$300

GOOD POINTS

- Can be set up in various configurations.
- Foldable for moving or storage.
- Latched gate, which means you don't have to lean over the high sides to reach the child.

BAD POINTS

- Failed minor safety tests — hinges protrude and there's minor chance of trapping a limb.
- Requires a lot of effort to unfold and fold.
- Not easy to move because it's heavy and doesn't keep its form well.
- No designated handle when folded.
- Care must be taken to avoid the finger pinch points when unfolding and folding.
- Relatively heavy.



About the rest

- The remaining seven playpens all failed a number of safety tests, including head or limb entrapment, hazardous snag projections and tipping (see *What to look for*, page 62). We don't recommend buying them.

SAFETY PRECAUTIONS

- Don't place objects against or inside the playpen that could help a child climb over the side.
- Keep the playpen away from hazards, such as heaters, stoves, power points and dangling cords from blinds and curtains.
- Ensure all latches are securely locked before use.
- Avoid soft bedding in the playpen and use only one floor pad, to avoid suffocation.

HOW WE TESTED

Safety Safety results aren't scored — a playpen either passes or fails a requirement. As there's currently no standard for playpens in Australia, our testers developed a set of safety requirements and test procedures based on various Australian and overseas standards for children's products, as well as the Australian Product Safety Framework. The result is quite a tough test. The testers used the requirements and tests to assess the playpens for the following hazards:

- Ingestion or inhalation of small objects.
- Contact with sharp corners, edges and points.
- Impact with projections.
- Entanglement with projections and openings.
- Access to dangerous objects or places (due to the child getting out of the enclosure).
- Falling from a height (due to the child climbing the enclosure).
- Entrapment in openings.
- Entrapment between moving or rotating components.
- Inadequate stability.
- Inadequate structural integrity.

Ease of use Each playpen received an ease of use score out of 100. Testers checked how easy they are to set up and pack up, and how easy they make it for a carer to reach a child occupant. They also took note of the features and accessories.

Some playpens pose a risk to adult hands, with 'pinch points' when folding or unfolding them.

What to look for

PLAYPEN BASICS

Check that the playpen has:

- **Adequate depth** (more than 500 mm) to prevent a child climbing and escaping or falling.
- **Adequate stability and strength** It should be strong, sturdy and resistant to tipping and lifting if your baby leans on the sides.

Check that the playpen doesn't have:

- **Small objects** that can be swallowed or inhaled.
- **Sharp corners, edges and points** that can injure a child.
- **Projections** that can injure a child if they bump into them.
- **Projections and openings** that can get tangled with a child's clothing — this can be a strangulation hazard.
- **Gaps and openings** that can trap a child's finger, limbs or head. Spaces between the side bars should be between 50 mm and 95 mm. Larger gaps can trap the child's head. It's also acceptable for spaces to be between 12 mm and 30 mm, which won't trap a limb.
- **Moving or rotating components** that could injure a child if part of their body got caught in them.
- **Footholds**, such as projections, openings or ledges that could enable children to climb out of the enclosure or cause them to fall from a height if they try to climb out.



USEFUL PLAYPEN FEATURES

- **Gate** Having one means you don't have to lift your child up over the sides. Make sure it resists being opened by the child but is safe and convenient for you to operate.
- **Multiple configurations** Some of the playpens can be set up in various configurations, which could be useful for sectioning off 'out of bounds' areas such as fireplaces.

USING THE TABLE

Safety tests Playpens either passed or failed these tests. See *How we tested*, page 61, for test details.
Ease of use See *How we tested* for what was assessed.

Dimensions Measured in one configuration only (several can be set up in various ways) — with the enclosure as close as possible to a regular polygon.
Prices are recommended retail, as of April 2008, or the price we paid.

TABLE NOTES

(A) Had a few minor failures.

PRODUCT		PERFORMANCE		FEATURES		SPECIFICATIONS			
Brand / model (in order of ease of use score, within groups)	Type	Passed all safety tests	Ease of use score (%)	Gate	Mattress	Weight (kg)	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Contact	Price (\$)
RECOMMENDED: PASSED ALL SAFETY TESTS									
Plebani Recinto ART 044	4-sided, plastic	✓	65		✓	11.1	65 x 102 x 102	www.babyco.com.au	149
WORTH CONSIDERING									
Lindam Safe & Secure LD124	6-sided, metal bars	(A)	65	✓	✓	14.3	77 x 106 x 125	02 9905 0666	250
Baby Dan BabyDen / Park'A'Kid	6-sided, metal bars	(A)	60	✓		14.1	76 x 107 x 126	www.cnpbrands.com.au	300
NOT RECOMMENDED									
Graco Tot Block Pack 'n Play 9261QB	4-sided, mostly fabric		70		✓	10.5	77 x 98 x 98	www.gracobaby.com	150
Infia Outdoor / Indoor 884	7-sided, plastic		65			6.8	62 x 136 x 139	02 4728 8000	110
Jolly Kidz Jolly Versatile HPP005	4-sided, plastic		65			9.1	59 x 114 x 114	www.jollykidz.net	150
Jolly Kidz Jolly Wooden	4-sided, wooden		65			7.1	61 x 111 x 111	www.jollykidz.net	100
Kiddy Cots Pushbutton PBP3	4-sided, wooden		65			6.2	62 x 120 x 123	07 3285 6616	120
Valco VeeBee V1253	4-sided, mostly fabric		65		✓	5.8	64 x 103 x 103	www.valco.com.au	160
North States Superyard XT 8666	6-sided, plastic		55			7.5	67 x 146 x 170	www.toysrus.com.au	150

CHOICE Books

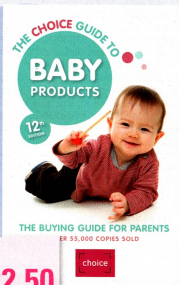
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The CHOICE Guide to Baby Products

Our independent guide to the best baby products on the market. Packed with practical information, *The CHOICE Guide to Baby Products* is the result of extensive research and testing by our CHOICE experts. There's information on bathtime, bedtime and changing accessories, plus feeding, toys, playpens and walkers. You'll find reliable and unbiased advice on:

- Cots
- High chairs
- Strollers
- Nappies
- Child car restraints

Our useful *What to look for* checklists are included, as well as information on safety around the home and advice on other issues confronting new parents, such as childcare, immunisation, SIDS and postnatal depression.



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Nowadays there are so many product recalls we may not be able to print all of them in CHOICE. For comprehensive recall information go to the Product Recalls Australia website: www.recalls.gov.au. If you don't have web access, call the Product Safety Policy section of the ACCC on 02 6243 1262.

Companies often rent 1800 numbers for a couple of months after a recall is announced. If the number given is no longer operating, phone the manufacturer or retailer directly.

CUPCAKE/MUFFIN CASES ■ McPhersons Consumer Products has recalled **Home Living 50 Muffin Cases**, barcode 9312601308197, **Home Living 50 Cup Cake Cases**, barcode 5010173951882, and **Party Extra's 30 Cup Cake Cases**, barcode 9312601097503. The muffin cases were sold between 17 December 2004 and 21 July 2008, and the Home Living Cup Cake cases were sold between 1 August 2002 and 21 July 2008, in all Coles, Bi-Lo, Big W, Kmart and Spotlight stores. The Party Extra's Cup Cake Cases were sold between 20 April 2004 and 21 July 2008 in all Woolworths stores. The cases are made from paper and have coloured designs printed on them.

The problem They may contain higher than acceptable concentrations of lead and chromium that may leach into the food.

What to do Don't use them. Return them to the place of purchase for a refund, or for more information call 1800 651 146.

TOY ■ Mattel has recalled **Fisher-Price Learning Pots and Pans**, product number H0681, which can be found on the base of the pots. It was sold between October 2007 and August 2008.

The problem There are screws missing in the blue toy pan which can cause the clear plastic cover to come loose and release small balls which may pose a choking hazard to young children.

What to do Remove it from the reach of children. Call Mattel on 1800 674 753, Monday to Friday, 9 am to 5 pm AEST, or email infoaust@matte.com.

TOY ■ Funtastic has recalled **Rampage 4x4 Ride On**, models S0770 and S0772, date code 07/02/07, sold through Toys 'R' Us, and **Crusty Groms 4x4 Ride On**, model S0602, sold through Target stores. Both products were available between July 2007 and July 2008.

The problem An internal electrical component may overheat and melt adjacent wiring, possibly causing them to ignite.

What to do Stop using them and remove from the reach of children. Call 1800 660 655 between 9 am and 4 pm, Monday to Friday (AEST), to arrange for a free in-home service, or alternatively, return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

FOOD ■ National Foods has recalled **Yoplait Go-Gurt and Yoplait Smackers**, all best-before dates up to and including 27/09/08. The products affected are Yoplait Go-Gurt Spiders, pack of 8 x 70 g, Yoplait Go-Gurt Strawberry and Fruit Salad, pack of 8 x 70 g, Yoplait Go-Gurt Raspberry and Apricot, pack of 8 x 70 g, Yoplait Smackers Strawberry, pack of 8 x 70 g, Yoplait Smackers Peach and Pineapple, pack of 8 x 70 g.

The problem A packaging defect means there is a risk of small pieces of plastic film separating from the outside of the tube, possibly posing a choking hazard.

What to do Remove them from the reach of children. Return them to the place of purchase for a refund, or for more information call 1800 677 852.

FOOD ■ Whisk and Pin has recalled **Whisk and Pin Gluten Free Muesli**, 500 g and 1 kg, white plastic bags, with best-before dates from 15APR09 to 25APR09 inclusive. It was sold in NSW, Queensland and Victoria.

The problem It's contaminated with gluten from wheat bran.

What to do Don't eat it if you have a gluten intolerance. Return it to Whisk and Pin for a replacement or refund.

WINE ■ Dorrien Wines has recalled **XII Apostles Mildara Victoria Merlot**, 2007, in a green glass bottle. It was sold through Cellar Masters, via the internet and phone orders.

The problem It contains sulphur dioxide, which isn't declared on the label.

What to do If you have an allergy or intolerance to sulphur dioxide, don't drink it. Contact Cellar Masters for a refund.

CHOICE Shopper

Find the best deal on laundry and kitchen appliances,

home entertainment, cameras, printers, computers and cars.

Call 1300 360 655 with the model name and number, the price you want to beat and your CHOICE personal subscriber number.

BATTERY PACKS ■ Polycorn Global has recalled **Polycorn Lithium-ion battery packs for SoundStation 2W wireless conference phones**, sold between 1 December 2007 and 2 May 2008. The affected battery packs have a black or white plastic coating and a white label stating "Rechargeable Li-ion battery".

The problem The cells used in the battery packs are substandard and possibly counterfeit. There's been a report of one overheating and causing minor property damage.

What to do Remove the battery pack from the SoundStation 2W phone unit and don't use it. Go to www.polycorn.com/2WBattery to fill out a form requesting a free replacement battery pack, or for more information call 02 9978 8098.

MICROWAVE OVEN ■ LG Electronics has recalled **LG Microwave Ovens**, model numbers MS2346VR and MS2347GR, with serial numbers commencing 708 to 802, manufactured between August 2007 and February 2008.

The problem An electrical shortcircuit may result in an electrical shock to the user.

What to do Stop using it. Call 1800 506 154, Monday to Friday, 9 am to 5 pm to arrange for the oven to be inspected and repaired at no charge. Record your model and serial number before calling. For more information go to www.lge.com.au/recall or call 1800 506 154.

HEATER ■ Hagemeyer has recalled **Dimplex Superheater**, model numbers R0F24T1 and R0F24ECC, manufactured between January 2006 and 9 August 2007. The affected heaters may have been sold after 9 August 2007.

The problem Overheating may occur near the control panel and possibly cause a fire.

What to do Don't use it. Unplug it from the power source and make sure it's cool before checking the model number, which can be found on the identification panel on the base of the heater. Call 1800 224 026, 8 am to 8 pm, seven days a week, or go to www.hagemeyer.com.au/dimplexrecall.

BICYCLE ■ Southcott has recalled **Amsterdam Classic 3 Speed Bicycles**.

The problem It has a faulty chainguard which can derail the chain. This would render the rear hub ineffective.

What to do Dealers should contact affected consumers, or otherwise contact the dealer where the bicycle was purchased.

BUNK BED ■ Pacific Impexp Services has recalled a **Trundle Bunk Bed** model LB70C-0017, a cream and blue bed with drawers underneath at side steps going up to the top bed, and **Bunk Bed** model AB107-5656, a green and white bunk bed with a computer table and wardrobe underneath and side steps going up to the top bed. They were sold through eBay from 1 August 2007 to 31 March 2008.

The problem They don't conform to the Australian standard and could pose safety risks to children.

What to do Don't use them. Call 02 4704 9426 to arrange for modification of the bed or a refund.

CAR ■ Peugeot has recalled **Peugeot 207 vehicle** manufactured between January and May 2007.

The problem In Peugeot 207 models fitted with the EP6 engine and automatic gearbox, the engine management software can go into defect mode, restricting the engine power output.

What to do Owners will be contacted by mail, or contact your nearest Peugeot dealer.

CAR ■ Peugeot has recalled **Peugeot 306 vehicle** manufactured between September 2000 to May 21

The problem The fuel filler pipe connection may leak due to wear and needs replacing.

What to do Owners will be contacted by mail, or contact your nearest Peugeot dealer.

FOOD REGULATION

Food regulation under the microscope

CHOICE is concerned about the extent to which food regulation protects public health and safety.

While the Productivity Commission reviews red tape in the food industry, CHOICE doesn't want public health compromised.

In its latest report on the *Annual Review of Regulatory Burdens on Business: Manufacturing and Distributive Trades*, the Productivity Commission looked at how it might reduce the red tape that applies to food businesses. CHOICE recognises industry frustration with inconsistencies that arise because food regulation is set at a national level but implemented and enforced at state and local council levels.

However, CHOICE is more concerned about the extent to which food regulation protects public health and safety. Food regulators focus on preventing safety risks such as food-borne illness and food contaminants. CHOICE thinks regulators also need to recognise the role food regulation plays in promoting healthy food choices and preventing diet-related diseases.

A healthy and diverse food supply is vital to protecting consumers' health. Food regulatory decisions, when made without regard to broader public health impacts, can undermine other public health initiatives. What goes into foods and onto labels can help or hinder healthy choices, such as suggesting sugary drinks are 'healthy' because of added vitamins and minerals. These contradict healthy eating messages to moderate sugar intake and may discourage consumers from eating foods rich in vitamins and minerals, such as fruits and vegetables.

In our submission to the Productivity Commission, CHOICE called for definition of 'public health and safety' to acknowledge this role of food regulation.

We highlighted the need for food labelling to remain within government regulation rather than relegated to co-regulation or self-regulatory codes, as some industry groups had suggested.

For more information or to read our submission, go to choice.com.au/food-regulation. ■



BANKING CODE

Banking code of practice

CHOICE is calling for major improvements to the Code of Banking Practice, aimed at reducing the number of penalty fees and giving consumers greater control of their bank accounts. The Code of Banking Practice is the banking industry's customer charter on best banking practice standards, but it's failing to achieve good practice in the area of bank penalty fees.



Penalty fees: a major consumer issue

Penalty fees are often charged in circumstances outside the consumer's control and without their prior knowledge. They can result in hundreds of dollars of lost income for relatively minor defaults.

Recently a CHOICE member wrote to us explaining how he'd asked his bank not to allow his account to be overdrawn. After further penalty fees for overdrawing his account, he contacted the bank for an explanation. The response was that sometimes the system doesn't work when EFTPOS is used.

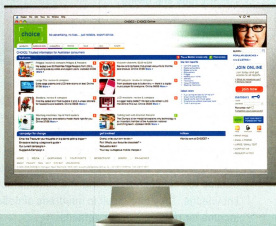
CHOICE thinks banks could do more to minimise the impact and incidence of penalty fees. Fewer and lower penalty fees will deliver a more efficient banking system and a fairer society. As part of our Fair Fees Campaign against unfair bank penalty fees, we're calling for the following changes to the Code of Banking Practice:

- Prohibit unavoidable fees, including deposited or 'inward' cheque dishonour fees and penalty fees triggered by the bank's own fees.
- Seek customer approval before allowing transactions that exceed a credit limit.
- Don't process account overdrafts without the customer's consent.
- Exclude all penalty fees from concessional bank accounts.
- Ensure the level of fees matches the direct costs involved in processing the default.
- Ensure customers are given a real-time warning that a penalty fee will be imposed if a particular transaction goes ahead.
- Establish standard penalty fee names. ■

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How to use this index

Bold type indicates a test, survey or trial report, unbolded type indicates other articles.

* Indicates an update of a previous report, additions or corrections to reports, small follow-up items, letters or recalls.

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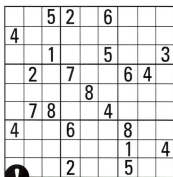
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The prize for best entry goes to R McKenzie for the aromaless aromatherapy products. Thanks also to N Moore, K & D Blichfeldt, F Ong, O Manor, I McDonald, R&J Parker, K Shaz and P Mathers for their contributions to this month's *Hard Word*.

If you have any examples you think deserve to be on this page, send them to The Hard Word, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204. Please don't email us your entries — we need the originals.



Want to emulate that cheap motel ambience at home?
Buy a pre-stained mattress — with your choice of stains.



Own goal to CHOICE!

A few sharp-eyed and sharp-brained readers picked up an error in the Sudoku puzzle used as an example of how to keep your brain healthy in our August article *"Pills for the thinking person"*. Would you believe us if we said we did it deliberately to test your brain health?



For use in utero?

We reckon kids weighing "up to 1.5 kg" wouldn't quite be able to sit independently.



Drumming up business supplies

While it's great that Encore Tissue encourages feedback on improving its "Tree Free" 100% recycled paper toilet tissue, it only gives a postal address — which means you have to use paper to contact them. On the bright side, it won't necessarily be wasted — it could end up in the next batch of toilet paper.

ENCORE Tissue, manufacturers of treefree, are committed to environmentally responsible recycling of post consumer waste and welcome your comments on how to improve this product.



Not-so-eternal Eternal Black

ETERNAL BLACK
Lasts up to 15 washes



Hmmm, smells a bit fishy...

A reader found a range of 'Aromatherapy' products in his hotel room. He reports the soap, shampoo and shower gel smelt quite nice: lemongrassy. But an aromatherapy shower cap, comb and sewing kit? Apart from a 'faint plastic smell' from the comb, our reader could detect no aroma, therapeutic or otherwise.